

**AMERICAN DIPLOMACY AND GLOBAL
LEADERSHIP: REVIEW OF THE FISCAL YEAR
2024 STATE DEPARTMENT BUDGET REQUEST**

HEARING

BEFORE THE

**COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS
UNITED STATES SENATE**

ONE HUNDRED EIGHTEENTH CONGRESS

FIRST SESSION

—————
MARCH 22, 2023
—————

Printed for the use of the Committee on Foreign Relations



Available via <http://www.govinfo.gov>

—————
U.S. GOVERNMENT PUBLISHING OFFICE

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS

ROBERT MENENDEZ, *New Jersey, Chairman*

BENJAMIN L. CARDIN, Maryland	JAMES E. RISCH, Idaho
JEANNE SHAHEEN, New Hampshire	MARCO RUBIO, Florida
CHRISTOPHER A. COONS, Delaware	MITT ROMNEY, Utah
CHRISTOPHER MURPHY, Connecticut	PETE RICKETTS, Nebraska
TIM KAINE, Virginia	RAND PAUL, Kentucky
JEFF MERKLEY, Oregon	TODD YOUNG, Indiana
CORY A. BOOKER, New Jersey	JOHN BARRASSO, Wyoming
BRIAN SCHATZ, Hawaii	TED CRUZ, Texas
CHRIS VAN HOLLEN, Maryland	BILL HAGERTY, Tennessee
TAMMY DUCKWORTH, Illinois	TIM SCOTT, South Carolina

DAMIAN MURPHY, *Staff Director*

CHRISTOPHER M. SOCHA, *Republican Staff Director*

JOHN DUTTON, *Chief Clerk*

C O N T E N T S

	Page
Menendez, Hon. Robert, U.S. Senator From New Jersey	1
Risch, Hon. James E., U.S. Senator From Idaho	3
Blinken, Hon. Antony, Secretary of State, U.S. Department of State, Wash- ington, DC	5
Prepared Statement	7

ADDITIONAL MATERIAL SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD

Responses of Secretary Antony Blinken to Questions Submitted by Senator Robert Menendez	57
Responses of Secretary Antony Blinken to Questions Submitted by Senator James E. Risch	76
Responses of Secretary Antony Blinken to Questions Submitted by Senator Todd Young	117
Responses of Secretary Antony Blinken to Questions Submitted by Senator John Barrasso	117
Responses of Secretary Antony Blinken to Questions Submitted by Senator Chris Van Hollen	122

**AMERICAN DIPLOMACY AND GLOBAL
LEADERSHIP: REVIEW OF THE FISCAL YEAR
2024 STATE DEPARTMENT BUDGET REQUEST**

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 22, 2023

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

The committee met, pursuant to notice, at 2:34 p.m., in room SD-419, Dirksen Senate Office Building, Hon. Robert Menendez presiding.

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

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

The CHAIRMAN. This hearing of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee will come to order.

Secretary Blinken, welcome back to the committee of which you have a long history with, so we appreciate you being with us again.

If we are going to address the enormous scale of the global challenges we face in the 21st century, we need a well-resourced State Department with the most appropriate personnel and tools to promote American foreign policy: From the horrific Russian invasion of Ukraine to increasing violence in the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo and a tenuous peace agreement in Ethiopia, to multiple failed states and active civil wars in the Middle East and North Africa, to the migration crisis caused by dictatorships, waves of criminal violence in Mexico and Central America and the tragedy in Haiti, to food insecurity, severe natural disasters, and extreme heat exacerbated by the climate crisis, as well as the continuing issues related to the pandemic.

We want to hear from you, Mr. Secretary, on how you plan to ensure that the Department is resourced and staffed to project American foreign policy including seriously countering the growing threat from China for which I think you will feel today, and I am sure in your other engagements, is strong, bipartisan, I think, bicameral view, the single biggest geostrategic challenge the United States faces.

China has made major investments in diplomacy and its diplomats are outrunning ours, not because they are better, but because there are more of them in more places in the world with more embassies and a seemingly limitless checkbook.

We cannot be on the sidelines and mired down in bureaucratic processes. We need ambitious and consistent resourcing. As you know, Senator Risch and I are working to put together a bill to put us on a stronger path to compete with China globally.

This will include resources and staffing, strengthening economic tools, expanding our engagement with Latin America, the Middle East, and Africa where there is currently a 40 percent vacancy rate at key American posts.

Bolstering our diplomatic and economic tools to compete with China is the key to avoiding a military confrontation while also ensuring we are ready to prevail in a conflict if it be necessary.

As we have seen with Russia and Ukraine, one dictator's warped vision of the world is all it takes to unleash a brutal modern war. Our unity of purpose with our democratic allies and partners against Putin's illegal war is critical and goes far beyond Ukraine's borders.

When we lead with diplomatic, military, and economic support; others follow. Our continuing support for Ukraine is not just about defeating Russia or to help Ukraine's freedom, which in and of itself are worthy goals. It is important that we send a message to others who would upend the rules-based international order. You cannot by force take another country's territory.

The U.S. needs to use all our tools more effectively to do that, which brings me to a third priority area we would like to see the Department address, which is security assistance.

Unfortunately, for years the Pentagon has encroached upon the State Department's vital and statutory role in security assistance, which is a critical tool of foreign policy, which we have seen most recently leveraged in Ukraine.

This has increasingly untethered our assistance from human rights and American values, which I believe damage our national security interests, and it has led to policies that focus on short-term tactical military assistance like we have seen with Azerbaijan blocking Armenians in Nagorno-Karabakh.

While I will continue working to solidify the State Department's role in the provision of all security assistance and seek to claw that back where it rightfully belongs and statutorily belongs, the Department has also worked to make sure we can fulfill our security assistance commitments to our partners while setting the stage to compete with and deter bad actors like China, Russia, and Iran.

We must reorient American foreign policy to be rooted in supporting democracy and human rights, which serve our long-term interests. Our foreign policy needs to help activists, environmental defenders, political prisoners, on the frontlines of confronting autocrats.

We need to be able to isolate and weaken those who undertake coups in countries like Chad, Sudan, Mali, and Guinea. We have to do more to protect women, girls, and young boys, who are the targets of sexual violence in conflict zones.

Finally, I want to reiterate the importance of building on the last 2 years of bipartisan work to resuscitate the State Department authorization process after a long hiatus.

I think this speaks volumes about how deeply the committee values the Department's work and personnel. It is critical that we modernize our diplomatic corps so it better represents our nation's diverse backgrounds, views, and talents and it gives them the tools they need to be successful.

We have got our work cut out for us, Mr. Secretary, and we want to thank you for being a constructive partner in this effort.

We appreciate the constant dialogue between our committee, yourself, and the Department, and we look forward to discussing President Biden's budget request in detail with you.

With that, let me turn to the ranking member, Senator Risch.

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

Senator RISCH. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Secretary, thank you so much for being here. Thank you for always being willing to take our calls when we have important issues to discuss. I sincerely appreciate that.

Although we do not always agree, as you know, it is good to talk and see if we cannot find middle ground to get to what usually is a common interest and common objective and I sincerely appreciate that.

These days there is no shortage of complex issues in foreign relations, including Russia's unprovoked war on Ukraine to China's ongoing attempts to coerce and dominate nations across the globe.

The American people need a State Department that is fully capable of advancing interests and values of all Americans and this will only increase in the future as China becomes a greater and greater challenge for us.

Now, we should all remember that that is the first challenge that we have even though we have other things going on like the Ukraine war, which are very important to us, but we can do more than one thing at a time. China is still the challenge of the century.

The Department needs to be efficient and effective with taxpayer dollars and use the authorities provided by Congress. For example, my Global Health Security Act signed into law late last year provided State with substantial new authorities.

The bill created a coordinator for global health security at the Department with the power to reduce redundancy, eliminate waste, and ensure unity of effort.

Remarkably, the Department provided zero funding for the coordinator. I hope you are going to talk about this a little bit today. I suspect you are since you and I have talked about it at some length previously.

We also enacted my Secure Embassy Construction and Counterterrorism Act, which allows our diplomats more freedom to leave the embassy and do their job while dramatically reducing the costs of embassies.

The authorities provided in SECCA should enhance our presence in places like the Pacific Islands where we are directly competing with Chinese Government for influence.

Secretary Blinken, I hope to hear how the Department is utilizing these authorities in implementing these laws because I remain concerned.

On Russia and its brutal war, I have visited Kyiv and seen firsthand the destruction and resilience of the Ukrainian people as well as the work the State Department personnel are doing to advance our security.

There is clearly more that needs to be done, though. The Administration should stop its dithering and follow the lead of allies like Poland and send the F-16s. I do not want to see this Administration push for a ceasefire in December because not enough is being provided now. It is important that the help be provided now.

Also, while I have consistently advocated for giving Ukraine more of the systems it needs to win, I have also been clear that we must conduct rigorous oversight to ensure that our aid is effective as well as transparent and accountable to the American taxpayer.

I have had direct conversations with President Zelensky about this and he knows that we are serious about this. We should increase embassy staffing and enable our diplomats to get out and conduct more oversight of the assistance dollars.

More personnel are needed for end-use monitoring of critical weapon systems and Washington needs to stop telling our team in Ukraine when and where they can go to monitor this.

There are currently 64 ongoing or planned audits and reports on U.S. assistance in Ukraine, and so far there has been zero evidence of illicit weapons transfer or misuse of taxpayer dollars.

Turning to the Indo-Pacific, I have long said we need better resourcing. I welcome the Department's request for increased funding. However, I remain concerned this money will be directed towards promoting the Democrat Party's progressive priorities rather than actually countering China, which is the primary objective.

The Biden administration must tell Congress what all this money is for. Right now without further details it looks like slush funds for the Administration's desires.

On Taiwan, I am troubled, but not surprised that the budget request lacks robust security assistance for Taiwan. Relegating Taiwan to a sliver of \$16 million in total FMF funding is unserious and frankly offensive, given the threats emanating from China.

Relatedly, in the Middle East, it is clear that the Administration is failing to compete with China. I just returned from the region and the Administration's policies across the board have created great, great concerns for our partners there.

Our partners continually point to an Iran policy that undermines their security, an Afghanistan withdrawal that makes them doubt American commitment, this Administration's slow embrace of the Abraham Accords, and increasingly restrictive arms sales, all evidence, they argue, of a retreating America.

It is difficult to persuade them otherwise in the face of the evidence. The recent deal between Saudi Arabia, China, and Iran proves the U.S. is sitting on the sidelines. Instead of fixing its approach, the Administration blames our partners for this outcome.

After all, great power competition is global. As a nation that has fought in both Europe and the Pacific, we can walk and chew gum at the same time.

Focusing on China is important, I have said for a long, long time. That does not mean we turn our backs on the Middle East.

Finally, as you have just returned from Africa, I would like to hear how you plan to deliver on U.S. commitments on the continent, including those made at the U.S.-Africa Leaders Summit.

We can only deliver if we have sufficient personnel and tools to conduct our diplomacy and development effectively. Many issues—I have no doubt you are up to the task of explaining them all to us in detail.

Thank you, Mr. Secretary. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Senator Risch.

Mr. Secretary, we will turn to you. Your full statement will be included in the record without objection, and you have got a lot to cover so I do not want to ultimately constrain your time, but we do want to have a conversation with you. Please, you can commence.

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

Secretary BLINKEN. Thank you very much, Chairman Menendez, Ranking Member Risch, committee members. Very good to be with you today as always, and thanks for the opportunity to speak to the Administration's proposed FY24 budget for the State Department and the Agency for International Development.

We meet at an inflection point and I think that is reflected actually in what both the chairman and ranking member said. The post-Cold War world era is over and there is an intense competition underway to determine, to shape, what comes next.

The United States has a positive vision for the future, a world that is free, that is secure, that is open, that is prosperous. The budget that we are putting forward will help us advance that vision and deliver on issues that are important to most of the American people by preparing us to engage effectively two broad sets of challenges.

The first set is posed by our strategic competitors, the immediate acute threat posed by Russia's autocracy and its aggression against Ukraine and the long-term challenge from the People's Republic of China.

The second set is posed by some shared global tests including the climate crisis, migration, food and energy insecurity, pandemics, all of which have a direct impact on the lives and livelihoods of Americans as well as people around the world.

With this committee's leadership and support across two State Department authorization bills, the United States is in a stronger geopolitical position than we were a couple of years ago.

We have drawn enormous power from investments we have made in our own economic strength and technological edge at home including through the Infrastructure Investment Act, through the CHIPS and Science Act, through the Inflation Reduction Act.

Our unmatched network of alliances and partnerships has never been stronger. We are expanding our presence in critical regions like the Indo-Pacific and we are leading unprecedented coalitions to confront aggression and address humanitarian crises around the world.

The President's FY24 budget request for the State Department and USAID meet this moment head on. The budget will sustain our security, economic, energy, and humanitarian support for Ukraine to ensure that President Putin's war remains a strategic failure.

The budget will also strengthen our efforts to outcompete the PRC. President Biden and I share the chairman and ranking member's commitment to the Indo-Pacific, which is why this proposal asked for an 18 percent increase in our budget for that region over FY23.

The budget contains both discretionary and mandatory proposals for new innovative investments to outcompete China, including by enhancing our presence in the region and ensuring what we and other fellow democracies have to offer, including things like maritime security, disease surveillance, clean energy infrastructure, digital technology, is more attractive than the alternative.

The budget will help us push back on advancing authoritarianism and democratic backsliding by strengthening democracies around the world, including through supporting independent media, countering corruption, defending free and fair elections, and it will allow us to pay our contributions to international organizations because we need to be at the table wherever and whenever new international rules that affect the livelihoods of our people are actually being debated and decided.

The budget will allow us to continue leading the world in addressing global challenges from food and energy insecurity to climate and health crises, and on that last point, we are celebrating this week the 20th anniversary of PEPFAR, I think one of the greatest achievements in our foreign policy in recent decades, which has helped save 25 million lives around the world.

This budget will help us continue the fight against HIV/AIDS while advancing global health security more broadly through a new Bureau of Global Health, Security, and Diplomacy, which I look forward to working with Congress to establish this year.

The budget will advance our efforts to modernize the State Department including by expanding our training flow, updating our technology, carrying out diversity, equity, inclusion, accessibility initiatives, including to make our overseas missions more accessible.

I am grateful for the progress that we have already made together including Congress' support in updating the Secure Embassy Construction and Counterterrorism Act and Accountability Review Board, which gives us more flexibility to open new missions and to better manage the risks that our people face around the world.

We know there is more to do and we are looking forward to working with Congress to accelerate modernization efforts so that the Department can better attract and retain and support our first-

rate workforce as they advance our interests in what is a complex and fast-moving landscape.

Finally, the budget will further a priority for me and I know for many of you and that is supporting Enduring Welcome, our whole-of-government effort to resettle our Afghan allies. Keeping our promises to those who served with us remains an unwavering priority. This budget will help us continue to make good on that commitment.

Mr. Chairman, as you referenced, when I began this role I committed to restoring a real partnership with Congress as an equal partner in our foreign policymaking and I really value tremendously the work that we have done together, the engagements that we have had, Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Risch, and look forward to continuing those and also to working on this budget together as we move forward in the months ahead.

Thank you very much for having me here today.

[The prepared statement of Secretary Blinken follows:]

Prepared Statement of Secretary Antony Blinken

Chairman Menendez, Ranking Member Risch, committee members: thank you for the opportunity to speak with you about the Administration's proposed FY 2024 budget for the State Department and USAID.

We meet at an inflection point. The post-Cold War world is over, and there is an intense competition underway to determine what comes next. The United States has a positive vision for the future: a world that's free, secure, open and prosperous.

This budget will help us advance that vision, and deliver on the issues that matter most to the American people, by preparing us to meet two major sets of challenges.

The first set is posed by our strategic competitors—the immediate, acute threat posed by Russia's autocracy and aggression, most destructively through its brutal war against Ukraine ... and the long-term challenge from the People's Republic of China.

The second set is posed by shared global tests, including the climate crisis, migration, food and energy insecurity, and pandemics, all of which directly impact the lives and livelihoods of Americans and all peoples around the world.

With this Committee's leadership and support across two State Department authorization bills, the United States is in a stronger geopolitical position than we were 2 years ago.

We've drawn enormous power from investments we've made in our economic strength and technological edge at home, including through the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, the CHIPS and Science Act and the Inflation Reduction Act. Our unmatched network of alliances and partnerships has never been stronger. We're expanding our presence in critical regions, like the Indo-Pacific. And we're leading unprecedented coalitions to confront aggression and address humanitarian crises worldwide.

The President's FY 2024 Budget Request for the State Department and USAID meets this moment head on.

This budget will sustain our security, economic, energy, and humanitarian support for Ukraine to ensure President Putin's war remains a strategic failure.

This budget will also strengthen our efforts to outcompete the PRC. President Biden and I share the Chairman and Ranking Member's commitment to the Indo-Pacific, which is why this proposal asks for an 18 percent increase in our budget for that region over FY 2023. The Budget contains both discretionary and mandatory proposals for new innovative investments to outcompete China—including by enhancing our presence in the region, and ensuring what we and our fellow democracies have to offer, including maritime security, disease surveillance, clean energy infrastructure and digital technology, is more attractive than any alternative.

This budget will help us push back on advancing authoritarianism and democratic backsliding by strengthening democracies worldwide—including through supporting independent media, countering corruption, and defending free and fair elections. And it will allow us to pay our contributions to international organizations, because the United States needs to be at the table wherever and whenever new international rules that affect the livelihoods of our people are debated and decided.

This budget will allow us to continue leading the world in addressing global challenges, from food and energy insecurity to climate and health crises. On that last point: we're celebrating the 20th anniversary of PEPFAR, which has helped us save 25 million lives worldwide. This budget will help us continue the fight against HIV/AIDS, while advancing health security more broadly through a new Bureau of Global Health Security and Diplomacy, which I look forward to working with Congress to establish this year.

This budget will advance our efforts to modernize the State Department, including by expanding our training float, updating our technology, and carrying out diversity, equity, inclusion and accessibility initiatives, including to make our overseas missions more accessible. I'm grateful for the progress we've already made together, including Congress' support in updating the Secure Embassy Construction and Counterterrorism Act and Accountability Review Board to give us the flexibility to open new missions and better manage risks. We know there's more to do, and we're looking forward to working with Congress to accelerate modernization efforts, so the Department can better attract, retain, and support our first-rate workforce as they advance U.S. interests in a complex and fast-moving landscape.

Finally, this budget will further a personal priority for me, and I know for many of you: supporting Enduring Welcome, our whole-of-government effort to resettle our Afghan allies. Keeping our promises to those who served the U.S. remains an unwavering priority, and this budget will help us continue to make good on that commitment.

When I began this role, I committed to restoring Congress's place as an equal partner in our foreign policymaking.

I'm looking forward to continuing our close coordination, and I'm grateful for the chance to answer your questions. Thank you.

The CHAIRMAN. All right. Thank you, Mr. Secretary.

[Disruption in the room.]

The CHAIRMAN. The committee will be in order. The committee will be in order. The committee will be in order. The committee will be in order.

The committee will stand in recess until the police can restore order.

[Disruption in the room.]

The CHAIRMAN. The committee will come back to order.

Senator Risch says this never happened when he was chairman. I do not remember that being the case.

[Laughter.]

The CHAIRMAN. Let me just say to our guests, we invite the public to be here so that they can see the proceedings, but there is work being done here and so we cannot have disruptions of that work.

You are welcome to join us, welcome to see what is happening. I did not say anything when you lifted your signs, but once you break into a public outcry, you disrupt the proceedings. That is not democracy in action.

We will continue. Mr. Secretary, we will start a round of 7 minutes. Thank you for your statement.

We just saw that Xi Jinping is doubling down on his commitment to support Russia's Vladimir Putin. Xi is no peacemaker. He seems ready to validate Russia's war crimes in Ukraine, required nothing of them to resolve the crisis except to blame the West and the Ukrainians for having the audacity to put up a fight against an illegal invasion.

In the process Putin has become Xi's junior partner, because I was looking at those agreements and they basically—well, actually, go one way towards China in terms of investments, but very little back as it relates to Russia.

He needs the international approval that he thinks Xi gives him and obviously they need each other for a variety of reasons. This is just emblematic of the global strategic challenge that China is to us.

We are focused on Ukraine, of course, as Russia continues its illegal assault upon the Ukrainian people, and its war crimes, and I appreciate that the Administration said crimes against humanity, but our long-term geostrategic challenge is China. How do you think this budget helps us begin to resource that challenge? Because we have more embassies, more personnel, in the Chinese Communist Party around the world than we do of our own.

Secretary BLINKEN. No, I very much appreciate the question, Mr. Chairman. Thank you.

A few things. First, there are a number of things beyond the budget that we have done to put ourselves in a stronger position to deal with the competition from China. One of them, as I said, are the investments that we have made in ourselves over the last couple of years, which are having a powerful impact around the world as people see that we are serious about our own future, and I point again specifically to CHIPS and Science, but as well as some other legislation.

Second, we have made a very significant effort to align with allies and partners around the world and we are seeing that play out in Europe, we have seen that play out in Asia, in terms of having a more common approach to the challenges posed by China.

Having said that, this also needs to be effectively resourced. One of the reasons that we are putting forward a request for mandatory allocations here is because we are facing a generational challenge and we think that the discretionary alone is not enough to help us out compete China.

We have to find and the budget proposes some new and innovative ways to provide viable alternatives at scale that discretionary funding does not.

I think if you look at some of the work that we are trying to do, we have a proposal for \$400 million to counter specific actions by China that counter our interests in the Indo-Pacific and beyond—\$2 billion for high quality infrastructure projects to more effectively compete with the work that China does that is not just economic, it is strategic in terms of advancing infrastructure.

We need to be able not, of course, to match them dollar for dollar, which we will never do, but to be more effective in catalyzing private sector investment and doing it in a more coordinated way with allies and partners.

We have investments in Indo-Pacific economies. We have a new DFC Fund, which is a critical tool, I think, to leveraging private sector investment and we have this commitment to the Compacts of Free Association with the Marshall Islands, with Palau, with Micronesia, as well as more broadly with the Pacific Islands where we are going to significantly increase our presence and engagement, all of which needs to be funded.

The CHAIRMAN. I appreciate that. I think we need—and Senator Romney has raised this several times—this is like a whole-of-government perspective. I have asked you about the State Depart-

ment, but you need a whole-of-government strategy to meet the challenge of China.

The CHIPS Act was one element of that that the Congress passed last year. I hope we can get a strategic vision from the Administration as to all the integrations of an all-of-government approach. These are good elements of that, but we need something broader and we look forward to working with you on that.

I want to turn to Iran for a moment. We have—

[Disruption in the room.]

The CHAIRMAN. The committee will stand in recess.

[Disruption in the room.]

The CHAIRMAN. The committee will come back to order. I would ask the—maybe you should ask the million Uyghurs in concentration camps how they feel about that.

Let me ask you about Iran. Iran continues to march on in its fissile materials, about 87 percent now—still has not come clean with the IAEA about its previous undeclared places—is providing drones—yesterday there was an enormous number of strikes against Ukraine by Iranian drones given to the Russians and obviously they must be getting things from the Russians that they need, particularly in equipment—that they need to ultimately achieve some of their goals.

We have their oils being exported to countries that are not observing the sanctions. At the end of the day, when are we going to get our European allies to join us in coming to the understanding that we are at a point that despite their best efforts, Iran has not lived up to its obligations to them under the JCPOA, to the international community, and continues to be a challenge?

Secretary BLINKEN. Mr. Chairman, I actually think they are at that point—

The CHAIRMAN. Are they ready to multilateralize sanctions with us?

Secretary BLINKEN. Two things. One is as a result of the effort to get back into mutual compliance with the JCPOA and the fact that Iran rejected what was put on the table by the European Union, by France, by Germany, by the United Kingdom, as well as us and actually supported at the time by Russia and China. I think that has demonstrated to our partners in Europe that Iran was not serious about genuinely reengaging on nuclear diplomacy.

At the same time, the developments of the last 6 months to include the provision of drones to Russia for its war of aggression against Ukraine to include, of course, what is happening in the streets of Iran, the repression of its people, all of that has further concentrated minds in a significant way including in Europe.

We have taken increasingly coordinated actions together with our partners, particularly with regard to sanctions. We continue to do that.

We are pushing back with them on the provision of drones and other technologies to Russia including seeking to break up the networks, trying to get at the dual-use items that go into the—construct the manufacturing of these drones and, of course, we are working ourselves to deal with the actions that some of their proxies are taking in the Middle East itself and interacting—

The CHAIRMAN. I just think, Mr. Secretary, that the Europeans have not joined us in multilateralizing our sanctions, which at this time to Iran would have a huge consequence and hopefully change their calculus in a peaceful way, and I just hope we can engage more vigorously with them.

I certainly talk to those who come to visit us and parliamentarians from those countries. It is time to come to the conclusion that if we want Iran to move in a different course, others have to join us as well, and I hope we are more robust in that part of the element while we are dealing with Iran.

Senator Risch.

Senator RISCH. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I concur with the chairman's remarks regarding the Iran situation.

The CHAIRMAN. Not on everything, just on—

Senator RISCH. Let us not go overboard here.

He and I met with the IAEA and I think they are doing a really good job. I really do. I think that there is a different attitude there than there has been in years past and they are very clear eyed and, more importantly, they are willing to actually talk about it and say the things that is on their mind about what they are finding and not finding.

Again, we need to encourage our European allies to join us in what we are trying to do as far as Iran is concerned.

You probably are aware that here in the Senate last week and this week and probably next week and maybe after that we are talking about a potential repeal of the 2002 AUMF. There are legitimate differences of opinion on this as to whether it should be done completely, whether it should be done partially, and that is all well and good and we are debating it.

Included in that, however, is an attempt to repeal the 2001 AUMF, and I have got a few questions I want to ask you about the 2001 AUMF and that is—these are just 2001, not the 2002.

The first question I have is, is the Administration currently using the 2001 AUMF legal authorities?

Secretary BLINKEN. We are.

Senator RISCH. Second question I have is, in the absence of a new AUMF to replace 2001, is it a vital authority?

Secretary BLINKEN. In the absence of being able to replace it with something to rely on, yes, it is.

Senator RISCH. Then, lastly, do you think the 2001 repeal should take place before there is an actual replacement of it?

Secretary BLINKEN. I would hope that if we are moving in that direction, we do this concurrently, which is to say there should not be any gap between the potential repeal of the 2001 authorization and a replacement.

We are fully prepared to work with Congress on finding a way if that is the direction you take to repeal, but replace 2001 with something if that is the direction of Congress that is focused, appropriately targeted.

As it stands, we continue to rely on it to make sure that we are protecting the security of Americans who remain under threat from al-Qaeda, from ISIS-K.

Senator RISCH. I appreciate that and—

[Disruption in the room.]

The CHAIRMAN. The committee will come to order. Committee will come to order.

Committee will stand in recess until order is restored.

[Disruption in the room.]

Senator RISCH. Moving along, I want to talk about the outcompete China initiative, which I think we are all in agreement on as far as objective is concerned.

How we get there, of course, is a matter of debate, and I do not want to get too far in the weeds on budgeting, but this is a budget hearing, after all, and the Department is seeking a \$2 billion mandatory expenditure and \$250 million in discretionary funds for that.

The \$2 billion mandatory funds probably are less likely than anything else. The question I have got for you is, are you thinking that there is going to be another or the Administration will be pursuing another supplemental if necessary? Is that the thought process here or what—

Secretary BLINKEN. No, Senator. I mean, I cannot speak to that at this point. I think it is premature to get to that.

The budget is on its own merits our best assessment of the resources we believe we need, absent anything else, to effectively advance the effort to deal with the challenges posed by China.

Senator RISCH. Fair enough, and although I think you would agree with me that the \$2 billion is—in mandatory is going to be tough to do. Would you—that is probably going to be a pretty heavy lift for the appropriators.

In that regard, as you know, I wrote to the Department asking about expenditure for hard infrastructure including transport, energy, and digital infrastructure, and I was assured that that was going to happen with the \$2 billion.

Then the question becomes if it moves from mandatory over to discretionary will—is your view the same that these expenditures will be for this hard infrastructure as opposed to social kind of programs?

Secretary BLINKEN. I am certainly determined to do that. We are going to have some top line budget challenges depending on how these funds are actually apportioned.

Senator RISCH. Fair statement.

Secretary BLINKEN. That would certainly be my determination. Look, we—to your point, we are in a competition, including on things like hard infrastructure where they are able to mobilize all of the resources of the state to do it in a way that invests in loss leader projects because it is strategically important to them.

Now, we have seen something of a backlash against this in country after country where it turns out that taking this money is not necessarily leaving countries in the best place—piling debt on, as we all know, bringing in laborers from China instead of using local workforces, not caring about worker rights, environmental protection, et cetera, bringing corruption with it.

It has been a double-edged sword for a lot of people. Nonetheless, the resources are significant. Our comparative advantage is finding ways to catalyze more effectively private sector investment. We need to be able to do that by putting some of our own money down—equity down.

One of the tools, by the way, that you all know so well because you have been instrumental in helping to shape it is the Development Finance Corporation and we also think it would be very useful to change the way that its equity participation is scored, which makes it very hard for it to provide as much equity investment in projects as it otherwise would.

It is what is most—it is the greatest guarantor to others coming in on projects to see a little bit of money on the table from the government. The DFC is an important vehicle for that.

Senator RISCH. I appreciate that. My time is almost up, but I want to take one quick bite of the apple here on Taiwan.

[Disruption in the room.]

The CHAIRMAN. The committee will come to order.

Standing in recess until the police can restore order.

We return to Senator Risch for—

Secretary BLINKEN. I notice, Mr. Chairman and Mr. Ranking Member, it does not seem to be directed at you.

[Laughter.]

The CHAIRMAN. No, it does not seem to be directed at me.

Senator RISCH. One quick question before I yield here is Taiwan. I was deeply disappointed when I saw what was proposed here. The \$16 million is—I mean, it is stunningly—if we are going to—if we are going to pursue the porcupine theory of how to defend Taiwan, I mean, the \$16 million is—does not even pay carfare over there, it seems like to me.

What are your thoughts on that? We got to do better than that.

Secretary BLINKEN. No, a few things and this—I know this warrants a longer conversation. Maybe we can at least start it.

When it comes to Taiwan, we have a couple of things. We appreciate the authority that has been given for foreign military financing. We also appreciate the drawdown authority, which we are looking at how we could effectively use.

When it comes to the FMS, what we put in place in the budget is a broader fund—an emerging priorities fund globally. It is about \$113 million, but when it comes to Taiwan, what we have been focused on is foreign military sales and over the course of the last few years we have done about \$5 billion in foreign military sales since the start of this Administration, about \$10 billion going back to 2019.

I have signed out more cases as Secretary of State last year than any previous secretary has done. Taiwan increased its defense budget by about 11 percent so it has significant means to acquire this technology.

We are looking at the best ways to get it. One of the challenges we have has little to do with our budgets or our authorities as, I think, again, everyone on this committee knows very well.

The long pole in the tent in providing equipment to Taiwan to defend itself is the production capacity here and this is something, of course, that we are working on, but in terms of the—both the monies and the authorities, we found that the FMS program in particular is best suited and there is certainly not been any delay in getting these cases out the door. At the State Department I turn them around very, very quickly.

Senator RISCH. Thank you very much. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.
Senator Kaine.

Senator Kaine. Thank you, Mr. Chair, and Mr. Secretary, welcome back. I want to focus on the Western Hemisphere.

The Administration's budget request is for \$2.7 billion in funding for the hemisphere and that is a \$430 million, or 21 percent, increase from the FY22 actual levels.

Just a couple of highlights. The largest country or regional level recipients are Central America, \$979 million, Haiti, \$292 million, and about \$275 million is intended for hemispheric efforts to manage migration.

In the Central American area one of the challenges we have is we would like to invest to deal with root causes of immigration, promote stability, economic development, but many of the government partners in that region are not reliable partners.

How do we make an investment of that size, \$979 million, or any sizable investment when the partners—the governments there are not reliable?

Secretary BLINKEN. I very much appreciate that, Senator, and the short answer is by as necessary working around the governments when we do not have effective partners.

Yes, we got about a billion dollars requested in aid for Central America. We have, of course, laws and regulations to ensure that the money is not diverted, for example, to corrupt actors, but at the same time we want to make sure that it is used effectively to do the things that we want to do, including getting at some of these root causes.

Vice President Harris led a major and very successful effort to generate significantly more private sector investment in Central America, a call to action that has produced over \$4 billion dollars in commitments from the private sector to invest directly in projects in Central America which will create opportunity, create jobs for people, and give them in that sense a greater opportunity to stay, not to take the hazardous journey to the United States.

Now, these things take time to realize, as you know, but we have a lot of work that is going on there and, again, this is not going to the governments. It is going to the private sectors. It is going to implementing partners in terms of our assistance.

We would like to be able to work as closely as possible with governments, but unless and until we are satisfied that we can do that in a way that does not result in the taxpayers' money being ill spent we are going to continue to work directly with NGOs or with the private sector.

Senator Kaine. Let me just—on the NGO point, just for my colleagues and to put it on the record—I am sure you are grappling with it—several countries in Central America have either adopted or are considering adopting very stringent laws against foreign NGOs.

Some of the very partners with whom we might be able to effectively serve people in the Northern Triangle and other nations are now kind of getting cracked down on by the governments and this affects not only the NGOs, but even USAID's ability to work with partner agencies.

Talk about the impacts of these laws and how you and USAID are attempting to deal with that challenge.

Secretary BLINKEN. No, you are exactly right. We have seen that these—some of these laws are ripped from the playbooks from Russia, China, and other places.

[Disruption in the room.]

The CHAIRMAN. Committee will stand in recess until the police can restore order.

Committee will come back to order. Please.

Secretary BLINKEN. Thank you.

No, you are exactly right. As I said—as you have said, we have seen different countries, including in our own hemisphere, put forward some of these laws that in very onerous ways restrict and in a practical manner actually ended up crippling some of the NGOs and their ability to operate.

Senator KAINE. In some nations like Nicaragua were not just cracking down on NGOs, but kicking them out of the country.

Secretary BLINKEN. Yes. In effect, putting them out of business entirely. That is exactly right.

This is also very much part of our own engagement, part of our own diplomacy, and part of the conversation that we have with other countries in the hemisphere who may have better relations with some of these countries than we do, to press them to use the influence that they have to make sure that that space remains open and does not get shut down.

Senator KAINE. Who are the star performers in the region? Because this is a region that really is backsliding in democracy in many ways, but not everyone is backsliding. Some are forward leaning. Who are some of the star performers in the region in terms of, for example, willingness to call out bad behavior, go to bat for NGOs?

Secretary BLINKEN. It is very interesting. I think, Senator, as you know well, we have countries that have very significant challenges, but a country like Ecuador continues to stand strongly for democracy.

Chile also speaks up and speaks out in ways that I think are compelling because it is not exclusively about governments of the right. It goes to the governments of the left as well. Those are two countries.

Now, of course, we have countries like Costa Rica that remains a champion.

Senator KAINE. Costa Rica, for example, together with South Korea, the Netherlands, the United States, and Zambia are five of the co-hosts for the upcoming round two of the Summit for Democracies.

Secretary BLINKEN. That is right.

Senator KAINE. What is the Administration expecting out of the summit at the end of the month?

Secretary BLINKEN. Well, what we want to do and see, and we will have more to say about that over the next week or so, is to follow up on a lot of the work that was done at the first summit to demonstrate that there are concrete results coming out of these countries coming together.

For example, on media protections, which is something else that is under challenge around the world, we have had very concrete initiatives to help defend journalists if they are literally under physical threat, to deal with lawfare that is being used against them to try to put them out of business with frivolous lawsuits coming from governments, funds that we have established to do that and, of course, in the NGO space, pushing back on the tightening of that space.

There are other countries in the hemisphere that have also been very strong partners for us—the Dominican Republic, on many things and as well Panama. There are—while trends have been moving in some directions, I think we continue to see some strong partners that we have a real incentive in working with and trying to bolster.

Senator KAINE. With a minute left let me ask you about Haiti. Obviously, we want to engage with other nations. I was in the region recently. A lot of concern about the security situation there.

There has to be something to stabilize the security situation before you could get into any meaningful political reform talks, elections, et cetera. Those are not going to happen easily with a security situation that is unstable.

Talk a little bit about the U.S. efforts to work with others to promote increased stability in Haiti.

Secretary BLINKEN. We have gangs running amok in Haiti and dominating important parts of the capital, Port-au-Prince, as well as other major cities, including ports, transportation networks, terrorizing people in their daily lives, but also in many cases aided and abetted by political figures and other leaders who use them for their own purposes.

We have been trying to break that nexus including by sanctioning leaders who we believe are supporting these gangs to try to break that up.

At the same time, we have been working hard to try to bolster the Haitian National Police along with a number of other countries so that they can provide the basic security that the state is supposed to be in the business of providing.

It is challenging. The HNP is very challenged, but we are engaged along with Canada and some other countries in trying to bolster them up. As you know, there is a very active discussion going on now about whether some sort of international support is needed to really manage the insecurity that Haitians are facing to get to an election, which Haiti needs because it is basically running out of legitimate actors at this point.

It, under present circumstances, would be very, very difficult if not impossible to hold. It is something we are very actively working on. The Security Council is also focused on this and seized with this.

I do not want to minimize the challenge, the insecurity, mostly as a result of gangs dominating the situation. It is a big problem.

Senator KAINE. Mr. Chair, I yield back. Thank you.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.

Senator Ricketts.

Senator RICKETTS. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Thank you, Mr. Secretary for being here today.

I want to start by talking about the United Arab Emirates. As you are aware, in January of—January 17, 2022, the Houthi-backed rebels or the Houthi rebels backed by the Iranians launched missiles and drones at Abu Dhabi and killed three people, injured six others.

In our visit there last month, the number of officials in the UAE treated this like their 9/11. They said those words specifically, “This was our 9/11.”

What they relayed to us was that they are unhappy with regard to the Administration’s response that President Biden did not call. There was a weak response from the United States. In fact, I think it was reported later that you later called the Crown Prince Mohammed bin Zayed and apologized for not having a stronger response.

I can tell you a year later they are still very mad that if you did indeed call to apologize it did not do the trick because they are still very, very unhappy. Instead of having the opportunity to talk about how we can strengthen our relationship with the UAE and how we might be able to make sure that we have got a strong relationship versus the Chinese Communist Party, we are instead lectured about this fumble in diplomacy.

Again, this just leads to our allies in the region looking for other help and we have seen that recently, for example, with what the CCP is doing. Obviously, we have all read in the newspapers about Saudi Arabia and Iran agreeing to establish diplomatic relations with the help of the CCP brokering that deal, which I think we all agree makes us look bad.

First of all, let us just start with how did it happen that we did not call the Crown Prince and have President Biden call him? I do not expect that that would be President Biden who would be thinking those things up. Should there not be somebody on his team be telling him, hey, you need to give Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed a phone call?

Secretary BLINKEN. Senator, thank you. In fact, I spent not just on the phone, I spent 2 and a half, 3 hours, in person with bin Zayed in actually Morocco. This goes back to last year.

We had a very lengthy discussion about this moment, and I agree with you that for our Emirati partners and friends this was a profound moment and I certainly heard from him what you just shared, the concern that we had not adequately engaged them.

Now, I will tell you that I, other partners in the government, did reach out immediately to our counterparts, in my case, the foreign minister.

If you ask the Secretary of Defense, he will tell you about the assets that we deployed immediately to bolster the Emirates’ security. He will tell you as well that the technology that was used to shoot down the incoming was American technology that we provided.

Nonetheless, I am deeply sensitive to the way this was perceived by our friends, and in my own conversations with MBZ made it clear that we understood and that we would be with him and stand with him against threats to their security.

Since then, we have been working on negotiating a strategic framework agreement to in very concrete ways address some of the

concerns they have, to answer some of the questions they have about their security, and we have done a lot of work on that and made, I think, some very, very good progress.

We have worked very closely together in building out the Abraham Accords. Part of—we started something together called the Negev Forum along with Israel, with Bahrain, with Morocco, with Egypt, that we all took part in.

We put something together that I think is going to bear very good results, bringing together the Emirates, Israel, India, and the United States, something we call I2U2, to jointly invest in infrastructure projects and the first ones are going forward in India.

We have made clear that in terms of some of the weapons systems that they seek for their security, we are fully prepared to move forward. These are systems that they started to discuss previously. They pushed the pause button. We said we would welcome pursuing this conversation, including the F-35s.

I think there are a whole variety of things that are going on in the relationship that demonstrate the seriousness that we attach to the partnership and our commitment to it.

Senator RICKETTS. Yes. I appreciate that and it is an important relationship. I encourage you to continue because I can tell you having just been there last month they are still not happy. This is still a very sore spot for them.

There is more that we need to do to make sure we can strengthen this relationship so and I would encourage you to figure out ways to not let this happen again to one of our key allies where a call from the President is going to be important.

I view this as the State Department and you as the head of the State Department's responsibility to make sure the President is informed about making these types of phone calls.

Next, I would like to move on to the effectiveness of the sanctions in Russia. Early in February 2022, President Biden warned Vladimir Putin that he has never seen sanctions like the one I have promised to impose and soon after Russia's illegal invasion of Ukraine the West did impose tough sanctions including measures that included the removal of the Russian banks from the SWIFT network, sanctions on Russia's central bank, freezing \$300 billion of Russia's foreign reserves, among other things.

The expectation of this was this would cripple the Russian economy. In April—the World Bank predicted by April 2022 the Russian economy would be contracting by 11.2 percent. The International Institute of Finance went even further, predicting the Russian economy would decline by a whopping 15 percent.

Instead, the Russian economy was weakened, but it certainly was not crippled, having shrunk maybe 2 to 4 percent last year, much less than that 10 to 15 percent that people were predicting.

My question is what did we miss. First, the ability for Russians to sanction-proof its economy as well as actions taken by the Russian central bank to implement aggressive capital control measures and interest rate hikes to prevent the collapse of the ruble.

Second, Russia would still be able to sell oil that would have gone to Europe to countries like China and India and in fact Indian imports of Russian oil are up 400 percent, as you know.

Then, third, the ability of Russia to circumvent these sanctions. For example, Turkish companies exported tens of millions of dollars worth of machinery, electronics, spare parts, and other items that Russia needs for its military.

Countries that border Russia like Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, have become primary importers of dual-use goods from the West and then reselling them in Russia.

This week, the New York Times reported that China has sold more than \$12 million in drones for Russia that they will use in the war effort.

Clearly, we have to do better. In March last year you said that Western sanctions are having a crippling effect on the Russian economy.

After a year of conflict in Ukraine, do you believe that these are crippling and, if not, what more do we need to do to sanction Russia?

Secretary BLINKEN. Thank you very much, Senator.

Two things on this. First, Russia did take extraordinary measures, for example, to prop up the ruble, the expenditures from its sovereign wealth fund as well to make sure it was propping up its economy. That certainly has some effect on some of the macro numbers.

As I see it, the sanctions, the export controls, are having and will have an increasingly powerful effect on Russia's ability to prosecute modern warfare, to develop its economy, to progress in its technology, to acquire and use energy extraction technology that it needs, to modernize its aerospace and defense sectors. All of these things are being dramatically undercut by the sanctions and by the export controls.

Yes, it is finding some substitute parts for things that are being denied by dozens of countries around the world. Those parts are inferior.

It is having tremendous difficulty in replacing the weapons that it is expending, particularly precision-guided munitions in Ukraine, actually replacing those, getting the parts to do that, and a combination of things along with the sanctions and import controls, including the exodus of nearly a million Russians, many of whom are the most educated, most technologically sophisticated, the fact that a thousand or more international companies have left Russia, do not want to do business there.

All of these things taken together, never mind the fact that horrifically some 200,000 Russians, by public estimates, have either been killed or wounded in Ukraine. All of these things will have growing and powerful effects on Russia's ability both to continue to have a modern, effective military and to have a modern effective economy, going forward. I have no doubt about the powerful impact of these—

Senator RICKETTS. Do we need to do more, though?

Secretary BLINKEN. We are working every single day, not just us, but in very close coordination with dozens of countries around the world. European Union has now done, I think, 10 different sanctions packages on Russia. This is something no one would have expected.

We have ourselves continued to look at the different actors that we can go after, the different sectors that we can go after, to have an impact and I think, again, you are going to see this increasing.

They are having tremendous difficulty replacing the equipment that they have been using up and they are looking at—you are right, they are looking at different places around the world, but it is not at all the same as what they had before.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.

Senator Merkley.

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

We have just witnessed a 3-day “brofest” with Putin and Xi celebrating authoritarian power. China, certainly, running over the top of Hong Kong and, of course, we are very concerned about its threat to Taiwan.

Russia assaulting Ukraine and trying to take it in just a brutal display of force.

How much should the American public be concerned about the way these authoritarian leaders are approaching the world?

Secretary BLINKEN. On one level, this is no surprise. Both countries have very different worldviews than our own. They may find common cause in opposing the world view that we and so many other countries around the world seek to defend and advance.

Before the Russian aggression against Ukraine, you will remember that they had—President Xi and President Putin had a meeting in which they declared a partnership with no limits or limitless friendship, depending on how you translate it, and to some extent, we continue to see that play out, I think, in many ways with Russia now as the very junior partner in this relationship, but a partner that may serve some interests that China has.

What we have done at the same time is to make a major reinvestment rejuvenation, reenergizing of our own alliances and partnerships and we now have much greater convergence than we had a couple of years ago on how to approach both of these challenges.

You see that in the coalition that has come together to oppose the Russian aggression against Ukraine, both in terms of the support for Ukraine and the pressure being exerted against Russia. You see that in the work that countries are doing together to deal with some of the challenges that China poses.

We have with European partners, Asian partners, much greater convergence on everything from investment screening mechanisms to export controls to outward investment—

Senator MERKLEY. Thank you. I am quite impressed by the way we have we have responded, but I do think that the circumstances regarding Hong Kong, Ukraine, and China’s use of high-tech to suppress the Uyghurs are very appealing strategies to many authoritarian leaders and we have decades ahead in which we are going to be struggling for the vision of democracy and human rights versus the authoritarian power.

One of the things that both Russia and China have been engaged in is transnational repression and last week, I introduced a bill with Senators Rubio, Cardin, and Hagerty, a comprehensive bill.

I want—you may not have had a chance to look it over yet, but certainly is trying to lay out a roadmap for us to respond to

transnational repression and I just want to keep raising this as a growing threat to citizens inside our own country and also the concern about how they are working to extradite people back to China or Russia with the grave consequences.

Secretary BLINKEN. We very much share that concern, and really welcome working with you, the other members, on that legislation.

Senator MERKLEY. I will be leading a congressional delegation to Vietnam and Indonesia here shortly at the beginning of April and we will be going to Jakarta to have conversations with ASEAN government. That is where their capital is right now.

How do you evaluate how successful ASEAN will be in being a significant part of the structure that kind of resists Chinese expansionist power?

Secretary BLINKEN. I think we are seeing increased concern among a number of countries in ASEAN for some of the exertions of power and influence that China is displaying, particularly, for example, when it comes to the maritime claims that they are making that are in contradiction with international law, some of the actions that the Chinese vessels of one kind or another are taking and we see this play out on a regular basis.

We are very much engaged, for example, with the ASEAN countries as well as within other countries and helping to build up what is called maritime domain awareness, helping to give them the tools to have much greater visibility on what is going on in their own seas to be able to see in real time any kind of aggressive action is being taken, to be able to see in real time the illegal unreported, unregulated fishing that is devastating livelihoods in many of these countries where China is one of the principal actors.

I think you are seeing a real significant awareness of some of these challenges and we are taking practical steps to try to help countries address it.

Senator MERKLEY. Thank you.

I might shift to Central America. A few years ago, I went down with Tom Carper to assess the challenges and we found the three C's, if you will. We found the cartels. We found the corruption, and we found the climate change, all driving, really, a disintegration of the economy and livability, which were driving factors of folks deciding to take the risky journey north.

We have a new opportunity with the new president. Well, not so new now, but of Honduras, President Castro. How is that going?

Secretary BLINKEN. We have been engaged with the President Castro administration. I think, by the way, as you know, the former president of Honduras is awaiting trial in the United States for corruption, among other things.

We are working to engage these governments, whether it is Honduras, whether it is Guatemala, whether it is El Salvador, there are challenges posed by some of the policies that the governments are pursuing, but we are working to find ways to engage with them on issues of clearly mutual concern to us. We are working on that on a regular basis.

Senator MERKLEY. Well, it is always helpful to have a new opportunity, but it is very difficult for a president alone to change policy when things are deeply embedded and the cartels are very embed-

ded and corruption is very much there, and climate change is not going away. A lot to overcome.

Going across to Burma, I led a congressional delegation years ago when Aung San Suu Kyi invited us to come and see that there was nothing to hide and then at the last moment, she and her team blocked our ability to see the some 300 villages that had been burned and razed and then since then we have had the military takeover and things have been perhaps even worse and we always hope that there is some kind of path back to democracy, back to some form of human rights, but it is not looking too good.

Any ways you can make me feel better about this?

Secretary BLINKEN. I wish that I could, but unfortunately I share your assessment. We have been working since the military takeover to do a number of things including, of course, first and foremost, stopping the violence, which continues to take place every single day and that has gotten worse to release prisoners and to get back on the path of democracy.

None of that has happened. We have been working with many other countries to try to exert pressure on the military regime. We have the—by the way, we have the Burma Act as well, whose passage we appreciate and welcome. We are working implement it.

Part of that goes to the support that we are providing to democratic groups in Burma as well as ethnic groups that are dealing with the repression coming from the military junta, trying to prepare them effectively for governance. At the same time, we continue to ramp up economic actions against the regime.

We have designated, I think, to date about 80 individuals, some 30 or 40 entities, military leaders, business affiliates, arms dealers, energy companies that are supporting the regime in an effort to exert some meaningful pressure to move them back to the democratic path.

You were talking about ASEAN a minute ago. Of course, we have been strongly encouraging the ASEAN five-point consensus for them to actually implement it in a meaningful way. That has been very challenging.

In short, I wish that I had something positive or hopeful to say in this moment. It is an incredibly challenged situation.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.

Senator MERKLEY. Thank you.

The CHAIRMAN. Senator Paul.

Senator PAUL. On September 12 and November 7 of last year, I sent letters to the State Department asking for records about Coronavirus research that had been funded by the State Department. The State Department refused to comply.

When Assistant Secretary Sherman came, I asked her the same question. She did not seem to be aware that you had been funding Coronavirus research, but you are. I got the “I will get back to you” line.

A couple of weeks later, I met personally with you at the State Department and asked you the same question. Will you not divulge to us the records of the State Department’s support for Coronavirus research, particularly in China. You assured me you would help.

We communicated several times over the phone with another Assistant Secretary of State who finally sent us a letter and said no, we are not going to give you anything.

That is where we stand and it is—my question is what is the State Department hiding? Why will you not give these records to the American people?

Secretary BLINKEN. Senator, thank you, and yes, I appreciated you raising this when we saw each other a month or so ago. My understanding is that our teams have been working to find accommodation. There is long-standing—

Senator PAUL. We got a refusal, a blanket refusal, no, they are not going to give us the records.

Secretary BLINKEN. We cannot directly provide the unredacted—

Senator PAUL. Sure, you can.

Secretary BLINKEN. —unredacted cables. We have a long standing practice with this committee about how we do—

Senator PAUL. You are refusing—you are refusing to release then, not that you cannot.

Secretary BLINKEN. No, but I think—

Senator PAUL. There is a difference between can and may. You will not do it, but you can do it.

Secretary BLINKEN. My hope is that we can find a way forward that answers your concerns so that you get the information that you are looking for. My understanding is that our team has been working on that and I commit to continue to do that so we can get you the—

Senator PAUL. We are talking about unclassified material. Most of this is unclassified. We just had a unanimous vote in the Senate and in the House and President Biden just signed a bill saying he is going to declassify stuff.

If you declassify it and you still hide it from the American people, that is a problem. I mean, we spend all of this time lambasting authoritarians and for lack of transparency, we have these silly networks on TV that are aligned with the Democrat Party saying democracy is under attack.

Well, do you think transparency has something to do with democracy? You are refusing to give records on research—money that went for research. We want to read the research grant proposals.

We want to read what the people in Wuhan sent back to the State Department saying they did. Which viruses did they create? Because the thing is it sounds all great. We are going to identify all the viruses of the world, but part of what they do is they take a virus they found 200 feet down in a cave and they mix it with another virus to create a virus that does not exist in nature because they say that is how we are going to further identify it.

There is a big debate that should be had whether that is safe, to take a virus from 100 feet down a bat cave 12 hours south of Wuhan and take it to a city of 10 million and yet you will not help us investigate this. You refuse and it makes—it is reminiscent of the countries we criticize for lack of transparency and yet you sit there and say you are still going to continue to refuse.

Secretary BLINKEN. Senator, I think there are very important debates that certainly go beyond my knowledge and expertise, for ex-

ample, on gain of function, that I know there is a vigorous debate about whether the risk outweighs the reward. I do not have the expertise to know that and—

Senator PAUL. How do we have oversight or investigate it if you will not give us—

Secretary BLINKEN. So the program that in this instance USAID was involved in was not engaged in gain of function—

Senator PAUL. That is a debate—

Secretary BLINKEN. But—

Senator PAUL. —and that is your opinion. We would like to see the records.

Secretary BLINKEN. So—

Senator PAUL. Fauci says there was no gain of function in Wuhan and nobody believes him anymore.

Secretary BLINKEN. Again, there is a, I think, an important debate about this. As I recall, during the Obama administration there was actually a moratorium put on—

Senator PAUL. I know, but it is not the debate. I do not want to have that debate with you. I only want to have the records.

Secretary BLINKEN. Again, I believe that we can find a way to get you the information that you are looking for.

Senator PAUL. All right, but the last response we have from you is “no.” The American public needs to know, I have asked many, many times.

I have asked you in-person. This is the second time in-person. I have talked to two Assistant Secretaries of State, and the writing we get back from you is “no.” Not maybe. Not will work with you. It is “no.” That is where we are now.

Secretary BLINKEN. Senator—no, and it is not “no,” just to be clear. We did reach back out to your team just as recently as this week to offer to provide all of that information in briefing form, which is to say—

Senator PAUL. Which means you get to read it and interpret it and spin it and we get to hear your spin. We do not want to hear your spin. We want to look at the—we are talking about—

Secretary BLINKEN. We are not in—we are not in—we are not in the business—

Senator PAUL. We are talking about grant proposals. You ask us—you act as if we are talking about the secrets of the Manhattan Project. We are talking about grant proposals, and we are talking about grant updates where someone has to write in and say, oh, we did this experiment, this experiment and we got this result. That is what we are talking about.

Same thing from NIH. Same thing from HHS. Everybody is hiding it. It is not even really something to protect the Biden administration. Most of this stuff happened in the previous administration, but I do not get it.

Why circle the wagons? Maybe there is nothing to see here, but then it makes the whole world think you are hiding something if you will not give it to us—

Secretary BLINKEN. Again, this goes—

Senator PAUL. —so just give it to us. It is a bunch of bureaucratic paper that we are looking to sift through to see if there are any clues because one of the biggest clues we have that they did

this is they asked DARPA and we only know this through a whistleblower—they asked DARPA for money to take a Coronavirus and put a fear and cleavage site in it to make it more infectious, and lo and behold, that is what COVID-19 is.

It looks just like what they said they wanted to create with our money and we turned them down. That does not mean they did not do the research. We are looking for research like that that they were performing.

We are looking for something that may be in their notes that has not been public, that has not been sifted through, but what we feel is that people at State Department and at NIH and HHS are conflicted. Why? Because if you funded research that somehow is linked to the pandemic or leakage of that, that does not look so good for the people who funded it.

We see this as a circling of the wagons and a conflict of interest that maybe there are people within the State Department who funded research who are worried that it might be linked to the pandemic.

We cannot just accept your spin on it because people there may be self-interested, the people who funded the program. We are just asking to look at the data, but so far your—it has been “no.” We have had a few phone calls. Well, we do not want your spin on it. We want to look at the documents ourselves.

Secretary BLINKEN. We are not providing spin. As I said, I believe we can provide the information you are looking for. We have long-standing practices and procedures in terms of actually providing documents and cables with this committee that we are not prepared to change, but in terms of getting you the information you are looking for—

Senator PAUL. The only cables we have that are a value we got leaked to us or actually they were declassified by the Trump administration. Those cables said, and these were from some State Department folks, and it was amazing. I do not actually fault anybody for missing it. I am sure there are thousands of cables, but in 2018 or 2017, they were sending cables back saying, holy you know what, they are over here working without gloves in unsafe conditions in a BSL 2 that should be a BSL 4, not a very safe condition and that is why some of our intelligence people have leaned towards this coming from a lab.

Why would you not want to help us? Why would everybody not want to help us?

Secretary BLINKEN. I have seen those cables. You are right. They have come out and I think what they said, at least as I read them, was that there were concerns based on State Department officials visiting the lab, so were a member of sufficiently trained—

Senator PAUL. Right, but we only know those because someone have the gumption to declassify them. I will end with this because I know my time is up.

Mr. Chairman, it takes one signature. He will give all this stuff to me tomorrow if you will sign a document, because he says he will not sign it unless the chairman of a committee does it and he is hiding behind some ruse. There is no law saying this. He could do it if he wants, but he is hiding behind some opinion that his own Administration makes the rules to say they will not give it to Con-

gress. If you will help me, we can get the information tomorrow. Everything he is saying he will not give me, he will give me tomorrow if you will sign a letter.

The CHAIRMAN. I appreciate—the Senator’s time has expired, but I appreciate your concern. I understand that my committee counsel spoke to your counsel this past Monday and your counsel followed-up with us today and we are in pursuit of trying to see how you can be accommodated and I look forward to making that happen.

Senator PAUL. Thank you.

The CHAIRMAN. Senator Barrasso.

Senator BARRASSO. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you, Mr. Secretary, for being here today. Appreciate it. I wanted to start with China being labeled as a developing country.

Today I led a group of 21 Senators—it was a bipartisan group introducing legislation to end lending to China through the multilateral development banks. Since 2016, China has received about \$23 billion from the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank.

American taxpayers—we are the largest contributor to these banks, and it is completely unacceptable to me for Americans to be subsidizing loans to China. The Administration continues to allow American taxpayer dollars to go to the Chinese Communist Party. I believe it needs to end. Not another dime should be approved.

These banks are designed to assist developing countries and China is no longer a developing country. It was years and years ago when some of these international organizations were put into place, but that designation has not changed.

China is the second largest economy in the world, clearly has the financial resources, the access to capital, to meet its own needs, without assistance from the international community, but the Chinese Communist Party continues to exploit this outdated label as a developing country to get these preferential treatments in loans.

As a developing country—“developing country”—China also receives funds from international bodies, mostly paid for by American taxpayers. China just got \$1.4 billion from the multilateral fund at the Montreal Protocol, which is from back in the eighties.

Let us be clear, this money moving from America to China, to me, is making China stronger and America weaker. This is at the time when China is blatantly flying spy balloons over the nation, stealing intellectual property, sending fentanyl and other opioids into the U.S., increasing military aggression. We have got the whole list.

It just seems that China is playing the international community as well as our own Administration as fools. Their goal is simple. They want to be the world’s dominant power.

Do you believe that China still qualifies as a developing country and why should American taxpayers be supporting lending and financial assistance that goes to China?

Secretary BLINKEN. Senator, I very much appreciate the point. I want to on that specific question I really have to defer to my colleagues at the Treasury Department.

What I can tell you is this. I certainly see as a general matter China continuing to raise the banner of developing country in a variety of places that does not reflect the reality.

Another part of this that I think is very important is on debt relief where countries around the world that turn out to owe a lot of money principally to China and then desperately need relief we are also a creditor.

Countries in Europe or creditors and elsewhere. The Chinese continue to insist on being treated differently, in the technical parlance, not taking the same haircut that everyone else is willing to take.

That is unsustainable and, in fact, in Sri Lanka recently where we needed to help Sri Lanka get out of the devastating debt situation it was in, we came together and insisted that no one else would provide the relief unless China similarly treated its debt.

I agree with you that these are important things we have to work out. On the specific question, though, I really have to defer to the Treasury Department.

Senator BARRASSO. Because we see we are giving subsidized loans to a country that then turns around and can use this money to engage in predatory lending to developing nations, as you have described.

Next, in terms of—I want to turn to European energy security. Europe has learned some really hard lessons following Russia's invasion of Ukraine. None are clearer than the need to have access to affordable and dependable supply of energy. Affordable, dependable, not—the word is not renewable. It is affordable, available, reliable energy.

Russia has demonstrated over and over again its willingness to use energy as a weapon to continue to do that. The world has seen Russia threaten our allies and our partners with natural gas. Europeans understand the crucial importance of increasing U.S. oil and natural gas production and exports to them from here.

Unfortunately, President Biden has not necessarily followed that path because of his approach on the issue of climate and carbon. Do you support increasing exports of American liquefied natural gas to help our allies and partners escape this dependence on Russia?

Secretary BLINKEN. I do and we have. Our exports to Europe of liquefied natural gas over the last few years went up 140 percent. We made a commitment to Europeans, to our partners, in dealing with the aggression against Ukraine to do whatever we could to provide for their energy security as they worked to move away from that dependence.

By the way, as you know, they have done actually remarkable things just in the space of a year to try to end that dependence both in terms of gas and in terms of oil.

We dramatically increased our LNG exports. Some of it we redirected from Asia. Some of it was a result of increased production. Oil production itself went up 11 percent and that is a result of the policies that we pursued.

Senator BARRASSO. Then you agree Europe is much better off buying energy resources from the United States than having to buy it from our adversaries?

Secretary BLINKEN. Absolutely.

Senator BARRASSO. Great.

I wanted to talk about fentanyl. I mean, I am from Wyoming. You would think, well, how much fentanyl could be going there. It is not close to the border, but every state is a border state.

Wyoming has seen an astronomical increase in the amount of deaths related to fentanyl. Our Division of Criminal Investigation just in 2020 seized about 1,600 dosage units. This past year 13,000. A 13-fold increase in just a couple of—and that was only for three quarters of the year.

What can we be doing more to work with the Government of Mexico to stop the importation of fentanyl precursors from China?

Secretary BLINKEN. Senator, I could not agree with you more. I think this is among the top, if not the top challenges that we face. As you know well, the single biggest killer of Americans aged 18 to 49 is fentanyl, synthetic opioids, and we seized last year enough fentanyl to kill every American. This is right at the top of the list.

Just a few things. I think we have a comprehensive approach to this problem. Obviously, there is work that we are doing at home just to protect our own people in terms of trying to reduce demand, treatment, antidotes, et cetera, but what is critical are a few things.

First, border security itself. We have the technology that is being deployed more effectively now to the border to much better detect the fentanyl that is coming into the United States from Mexico. Ninety-six percent of it is coming through ports of entry. The screening technology that is being deployed that will make a difference.

We are working with Mexico to disrupt the cartels. Mexico has actually taken with our support significant action to arrest and to disrupt the cartels, the criminal enterprises that are engaged in this, to shut down the labs, to go after the leaders. Then, at the same time, there is another aspect of this problem that goes beyond Mexico.

One of the challenges—and it goes to China, among other countries—one of the challenges is the diversion of licit precursors into the illicit production of fentanyl. There is a lot that we are doing to try to rally the world to deal with this problem and so, for example, voluntary agreements among countries and companies, because the private sector is critical, to share information, to better label products, to make sure that you know your customer when you are shipping a chemical that is legal, but then it is being diverted.

All of these are making a difference. For the very first time—I just came from the G-20 foreign ministers meeting—for the first time the United States got this on the G-20 agenda. This is important because those countries, the wealthiest economies in the world, are the very ones along with their private sectors that can make a big difference.

We are putting all of this together. We have with the Mexicans a joint synthetic drug action plan that we agreed to last year that is intensely focused on synthetic opioids, notably fentanyl.

By the way, one of the other things that is happening—I will be quick—is the Mexicans themselves are feeling the brunt of this, which is to say not only have they been a country where this is being made in and shipped through, but more and more Mexicans, unfortunately, are falling victim to synthetic opioids.

Their feelings—I have spoken to President López Obrador about this directly. He sees with this we are doing a lot in partnership with him to disrupt, to take these cartels down.

Senator BARRASSO. Let me just end with this, Mr. Chairman, and maybe put this to you in writing.

Last week, the U.S. Border Patrol—because you mentioned border security—the Border Patrol chief Ortiz testified before a House Homeland Security Committee hearing in McAllen, Texas.

He was pointedly asked whether or not the Department of Homeland Security had operational control of the border and the chief of the U.S. Border Patrol said, “No, sir.”

Thank you. That is—

Secretary BLINKEN. The only thing I would just add, if I could, Senator, is just in the case of fentanyl, that is speaking to a larger issue. What we really have to bear down on, I think, it is not my vector of expertise, but based on what I know on the border itself, as I said, about 95 percent of this is coming through the legal ports of entry. It is being smuggled in through those ports, not at points along the border.

We do have technology that is much more effective than we have had to be able to detect it. It is being—it is under the seats of cars—

Senator BARRASSO. We have all—we have all had the tour and seen what they describe.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Secretary BLINKEN. Thank you.

The CHAIRMAN. According to President López Obrador, fentanyl is not produced in Mexico.

Senator Duckworth.

Senator DUCKWORTH. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you, Secretary Blinken, for appearing here today. The meeting earlier this week of our—of the leaders of our two main strategic competitors demonstrate the continued urgency of our nation having a diplomatic corps that is second to none. I thank you for your efforts to make this a reality and look forward to engaging more to support our ongoing progress towards this goal.

I want to start with my concern with the PRC actions across the Indo-Pacific from the Mekong River to the South China Sea to the Pacific Island nations, and it is no secret that the PRC is using economic coercion and expanding their diplomatic presence in this key area and reality dictates that countries in this region cannot ignore the PRC’s presence and proximity and, yet, I still hear from our allies and partners about how the United States remain a strong partner of choice, and you have mentioned this before.

I also hear from Southeast Asian partners specifically about how central ASEAN, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, is to their regional identity and as a shield against dominance by foreign powers.

My colleague, Senator Merkley, mentioned the importance of ASEAN and the role that it plays beyond economic organization, for example, the work that it is doing to hold Burma accountable for the fine points—concerns, and in February I met a CODEL to Jakarta to engage with ASEAN as an institution and with Indonesia bilaterally.

There, I saw firsthand the eagerness of our partners for more, not less, U.S. engagement, particularly on economic affairs.

Secretary Blinken, can you provide a candid analysis of your Department's relationship building initiatives with key allies and partners in Southeast Asia, particularly with organizations like ASEAN, and in particular ASEAN itself and explain how this budget will improve our ability to advance our Indo-Pacific objectives?

Secretary BLINKEN. Thank you very much. I really appreciate the question.

First, just very quickly, as you know very well, this is a critical area for us. We have got 50 percent of the world's population in the Indo-Pacific. We have got 60 percent of it is GDP. We have a region that is driving basically 75 percent of economic growth over the last 5 or 6 years.

This is vital to us. As it happens, China invests about 50 percent of its assistance programs and its economic and diplomatic resources in the Indo-Pacific. We have to be there, first and foremost, and that goes to the efforts that we are doing and the chairman referenced it at the start.

We may not be able to match China person for person, but we are going to be engaged in ways that we have not been. We are significantly increasing our diplomatic presence in the Pacific Islands.

As you know, we have opened to the Solomon Islands. We are looking at other embassies in Tonga and in Kirabass. At the same time, we have very significantly reengaged ASEAN, including President Biden having an extraordinary summit meeting with the ASEAN countries precisely because we think it is an important institution for working together to deal with some of these challenges.

At the same time—this goes back to the budget—we want to make sure that we are appropriately resourced so that when it comes to countries throughout the region that have interests and have needs and may be looking to us to be a strong partner, we actually have something to offer and it is less about, as I said, forcing them to choose.

It is more about giving them a choice, and the budget is really designed in that way when it comes, for example, to having the resources to invest coherently in infrastructure, to dealing with building climate resilience and adaptation. The Pacific Island countries, of course, some of them are literally at risk of no longer existing if they are not able to deal with that.

We have the programs in place and the budget supports that to be able to do that, but also their own diplomatic and political weight is important and marshaling that on a given problem whether it is Burma or whether it is some of the actions that China engages in that they do not like and we do not like, there is much more power and effectiveness and doing—engaging these issues together than there is any one of these countries doing it alone. That is why ASEAN itself is important.

One of the things that they have worked on for years, as you know, with China is a code of conduct in the maritime space. I think China has been dragging that along for a long time. We tried to help reinforce that.

For example, we put out—the State Department put out last year the definitive legal analysis of all of the maritime claims to basically help countries push back against some of the egregious assertions by China in their maritime space in very practical ways, as I mentioned earlier.

We are working to give them the tools and resources to have better what is called maritime domain awareness—they have better visibility on their own seas and oceans, for example, to detect illegal unregulated unreported fishing, which is devastating economies and livelihoods in a large part of the region.

Across a whole series of things, we are working together and the budget attempts to reflect the importance of that work.

Senator DUCKWORTH. Does the budget include an increase to our mission to ASEAN?

Secretary BLINKEN. I do not know if it actually has an increase in what is needed for the mission. I believe that we are appropriately resourced, but let me come back to you on that and if you have identified any deficiencies I am happy to hear them.

We sent someone very experienced, very close to the President to be our representative to ASEAN and who was the executive secretary of the National Security Council who has been doing a terrific job. I have engaged repeatedly in-person as well as, of course, remotely with all of our ASEAN colleagues and with ASEAN itself.

Senator DUCKWORTH. I would hope that our ambassador to ASEAN is given all the tools he needs to do the job and I do not think he has all the resources that he needs. I would love to review the budget with you on that.

Secretary BLINKEN. I will follow up with you on that.

[EDITOR'S NOTE.—The requested information referred to above follows:]

The FY 2024 Diplomatic Engagement request includes an additional \$600,000, including a \$500,000 increase to EAP for the U.S. Mission to ASEAN and +\$100,000 increase to ISN for ASEAN regional forum support, which will be detailed in the release of the FY 2024 CBJ Appendix 1.

In addition, the FY 2024 foreign assistance request for ASEAN is \$72.6 million, which is an increase of \$57.4 million over the FY 2022 actual and \$47.6 million above the FY 2023 adjusted enacted.

Senator DUCKWORTH. Thank you. Can you also elaborate more—you touched on this—how the economic initiatives in the budget include both newer initiatives such as Outcompete China and the Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment, as well as ongoing efforts like the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework will advance our policy goals in the Indo-Pacific region?

Drill down a little bit more. I know I am getting into the weeds, but I am very interested.

Secretary BLINKEN. No, I think it is important. We have a number of programs that we propose to fund in the budget to counter some of the challenges posed by China in the region.

For example, on supply chain dominance one of the things that we put together is something called the Mineral Securities Partnership, where we are pooling information and pooling resources with a number of other countries to be able to invest ourselves in critical minerals so that they are not dominated by any one country.

We are working to build much greater supply chain resiliency, particularly among countries in that region. We have now about 17 economies that are part of this process to prevent near-term disruptions, to make sure that we develop early warning signals in case our supply chains are disrupted and, of course, for more fundamentally, building out—helping these countries build out a significant amount of infrastructure.

We are doing that through some of the funding we have in the budget for the Asia Pacific. We also more broadly have something that the President established with the G-7 called the Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment and that really runs the gamut.

We have been able to generate investments, starting with government resources, but primarily getting the private sector to invest—we were the catalyst for it—in everything from Brazil nickel and cobalt mining to the Indonesian energy transition, a \$20 billion investment in helping them make a transition, upgrading telecom networks in the Pacific Island countries, mobilizing investment capital for internet service providers in the region as well as in Africa and in Latin America, setting up vaccine manufacturing in Senegal, and rail linkages among countries in Africa, all of which deals with some of the challenges that China has posed and being able to have the field to itself in many of these areas.

No longer the case, but there is an intense focus in the budget on the Indo-Pacific more specifically, including a fund to focus infrastructure investment in the region.

Senator DUCKWORTH. Thank you. Wow, 7 minutes goes quick, Mr. Chairman. Or 8 minutes.

The CHAIRMAN. It does when you are covering the world, or even a very specific part of the world.

Senator Young.

Senator YOUNG. Thank you, Chairman.

Good to see you, Mr. Secretary. Welcome to the committee.

Secretary BLINKEN. Thank you.

Senator YOUNG. The CHIPS and Science Act established an International Technology Security and Innovation Fund. I know you are familiar with it—ITSI—at the State Department to promote international 5G communication security and to secure our semiconductor supply chains. Our long-term national security and economic competitiveness hinge on these two critical technologies.

First, I want to thank you and your staff for their hard work on these critical topics. I was encouraged to hear that the U.S. was first to engage with our allies to secure critical semiconductor minerals and to create additional downstream packaging capacity.

In my view, the first mover advantage further emphasizes the importance of the CHIPS and Science Act. Mr. Secretary, can you describe the strategic impact it would have if the ITSI fund is fully resourced? Looking forward toward the next 5 years of this fund, what are your goals for this program? If you could discuss that, and we will take it from there.

Secretary BLINKEN. Great. Well, Senator, thank you, and as you know, I think that with your leadership what Congress was able to do in putting together the CHIPS and Science Act is one of the

most important achievements we have had in our ability to compete effectively, particularly with China.

By the way, when I go around the world, this is one of the things I hear from country after country. They are very well aware of CHIPS and Science and they appreciate it. I think one of the great merits, from our perspective, is the fact that under the Act, you provided funding over 5 years so it is very predictable for us to really do two things, to shore up semiconductor supply chains, downstream and upstream and also to make sure on the telecommunication side that we are helping countries put in place networks and infrastructure, using trusted vendors and making sure that—and advancing technology like ORAN that really is the future and, again, is necessary to making sure that they are not dealing with untrusted vendors.

We have, as you know, and I know our teams have been working very closely together, mapped out how we would use both prongs of the fund—that is the semiconductor prong and the information communications technology prong, making sure that we are getting the upstream inputs and providing the critical minerals that are needed for our own fabs that are now being built to actually make the chips, a market that, as you know better than anyone, the PRC currently dominates, but that now we have an ability to make real inroads on.

Policy coordination among fab nations, usually important and we are seeing that really come to fruition. We basically cannot have countries leaking technology as fast as they can make it and I think this fund gives us the resources to do that.

Expanding downstream capacity, as you mentioned, in a very significant way, and then the data mapping piece of this. We are mapping the supply chains. We are mapping all the entities involved to ensure that we are targeting them to the best effect.

As I said, on the telecommunication side of things developing, strengthening, and expanding international enabling environments for these secure networks and deploying ICT networks and services in partner countries, being able to go at with a real alternative, 5G coming from other places with something like ORAN driving down the costs, providing more secure networks and all of this mapped out over 5 years because we have got the predictable funding that is being provided.

Senator YOUNG. Thank you for that. I think it will be really helpful if on an ongoing basis members of this committee—and I know my office has been working very closely with your team—but if we were made privy to goals and any adjustments that may be made and maybe give us some visibility into the internal tools like supply chain mapping that you are using to track progress towards those goals.

Secretary BLINKEN. Be happy to do that.

Senator YOUNG. Thank you. Relatedly, how are you working with Secretary Raimondo to align the priorities of your respective departments with—as it relates to CHIPS and Science implementation?

Secretary BLINKEN. I would say the best description is hand-in-glove. I am not sure who is the hand, who is the glove, but hand-in-glove. For example, the Secretary and I together convened a cou-

ple dozen countries at the minister level—commerce secretary for foreign minister level—on supply chains, on building out resilience, diversification, nearshoring, friendshoring.

One of the things that came out of that ministerial—it is an ongoing process—is putting in place now an early warning system among these countries for any supply chain disruptions when it comes to, for example, critical minerals, anything going into a semiconductor.

That is the result directly of the work that our two departments and we personally have done together.

Senator YOUNG. Is there anything else Congress can do at this point to assist you in your efforts with respect to CHIPS and Science implementation?

Secretary BLINKEN. I think as it stands, our budget reflects what we need, but what I want to do, if I can, is just come back and make sure I am giving you the most considered response possible in case I am missing anything because this is too important not to get right.

[EDITOR'S NOTE.—The requested information referred to above follows:]

We are grateful to Congress for providing \$500 million over 5 years to empower the Department to work with our partners and allies to secure and expand our critical semiconductor supply chains and promote the adoption of trustworthy telecommunication technologies.

As is reflected in our budget request, the Department is working tirelessly with our interagency partners to develop programs that meet the Administration's priorities under the CHIPS Act.

We have been especially appreciative of our engagement with Congress.

In addition to keeping all stakeholders apprised of developments, these exchanges and informational briefings have ensured our planning process was attuned to your concerns and reflected your feedback from the earliest days of planning.

The result is an ambitious, multifaceted plan for Diplomatic Engagement and Foreign Assistance programming that confronts vulnerabilities of the global supply chain at every critical node.

In the coming weeks and months, we will be transmitting additional foreign assistance Congressional Notifications (CNs) for the FY 2023 CHIPS ITSI Fund allocation.

We would ask for Congress's continued responsiveness in reviewing these CNs and, as always, will stand ready to respond to your requests for any additional briefings on the anticipated programs.

Senator YOUNG. Finally, Mr. Secretary, your staff identified the critical role that civilian, foreign law enforcement, and military personnel play in establishing secure communication networks.

Congress provided the authority through the Digital Connectivity and Cybersecurity Partnership and the Economic Support Fund to work with all of these groups with FY23 funds, but not, as I understand it, for the rollover of earlier funds.

I look forward to working with my colleagues, particularly those on the State and Foreign Ops Subcommittee, to provide the necessary budgetary authority to continue this important work. Is that something you would endorse?

Secretary BLINKEN. Unless I am missing something, I would welcome that. I do not know if there is something in place that has us covered that I am not aware of, but at least as described it is something I would welcome.

Senator YOUNG. Thank you. I yield back.

Secretary BLINKEN. Thanks.

The CHAIRMAN. Senator Shaheen.

Senator SHAHEEN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Secretary, it is nice to see you again. It is nice to have two opportunities today to ask about what is happening in the world.

I want to start with Belarus because earlier today the Free Belarus Caucus had a press conference with Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, who is the pro-democracy leader of the movement there and I think she is courageous and inspiring and they need our help.

One of the things we talked about is, given the war in Ukraine and what that has meant for the Belarusian people and the lack of a special envoy for Belarus, there is nobody who can help encourage the Europeans and the U.S. to work together or serve as a conduit to the opposition movement.

Can you talk about what you are thinking with respect to a special envoy for Belarus and when might we see that appointment happen?

Secretary BLINKEN. No, thank you very much, Senator for raising that and yes, two things. As you know, day in, day out, we have the Vilnius-based, Lithuania-based Belarus affairs unit that is embedded in our embassy and they are doing the day in, day out, contact because so much, as you know, of the democratic opposition is in Lithuania.

To your point, we are very actively looking at moving forward with the special envoy. What I am considering right now looking at is dual hatting a very senior official in our European Affairs Bureau to also serve as the envoy to be able to then go in and out, engage at senior levels with the opposition, even as the Belarus affairs unit that is based in Lithuania does the kind of day in, day out, engagement.

Senator SHAHEEN. Do you have a timetable for when you hope to make that happen?

Secretary BLINKEN. I cannot put a—I hate to say very soon, but very soon, I promise you very soon.

Senator SHAHEEN. I will hold you to that so the next time I see you, hopefully, it will be done. I also want to say how pleased I am to see the robust funding for the western Balkans in the President's budget, particularly increased funding for Bosnia and Herzegovina, and also very pleased to see the work that the State Department has done with our European allies to encourage Serbia and Kosovo to come to some agreement.

I wonder if you could talk about what kind of role the Congress might play and whether there are particular incentives that we should be thinking about to ensure that that agreement actually gets implemented.

Secretary BLINKEN. Thank you. This is, I think, a hopeful thing that is the progress that has been made between Serbia and Kosovo, particularly an agreement that was reached just this past weekend to implement with an implementation roadmap understandings between them on the path to normalization.

I think what is significant about it, besides the fact that both countries have nominally agreed to do it, is that that is also embedded. Those commitments are embedded in their respective Euro-

pean Union accession plans, so that gives them some incentive, I hope, to follow through.

We have been, as you pointed out, intimately involved in helping get to this result. The European Union has done a very good job. We have been there every single step along the way.

I have engaged both Prime Minister Kurti and President Vucic on numerous occasions on this. I think there is a moment—there is a positive moment, but to your point, I think it would be tremendously helpful if in your own engagements with, for example, parliamentarians in both countries the clear support of the Congress of the United States for moving forward and for implementing these agreements, I think, could be critical.

To some extent, for example, both leaders have to navigate differences of opinion in their legislatures about this. I think your voice on this could make a real difference. I would strongly encourage that as well as your engagements with the leaders themselves.

Senator SHAHEEN. I certainly think there is a lot of interest on the part of the members of this committee in doing that and thinking about how we can be supportive of the implementation of the agreement actually happening.

One of the issues, as you know, is nonrecognition by a number of European countries. Is this an issue that you are raising with those five countries and are you seeing any progress?

Secretary BLINKEN. It is very much an issue that we are raising, will continue to raise, but I also think this agreement, again, assuming it moves forward, actually puts us on a path toward recognition by these countries. Now, Serbia itself, that may be another matter for some time, but if they get to a normalized relationship that would, I think, have very positive effects just in the day in, day out, interactions, and I think will eventually get there.

For the five holdout countries, the fact that the both countries now have reached this agreement and assuming they implement it, that will, I think, move them toward recognition.

Senator SHAHEEN. I agree. I certainly think it helps and I think it is really important for the people in both Kosovo and Serbia to see some benefit to in their personal lives from that kind of an agreement that reduces tensions and, hopefully, moves both countries towards membership in the EU.

On Lebanon, another area where they are facing real challenges, what are we doing to try and encourage the Government of Lebanon to implement necessary reforms in order to get the IMF to—and the World Bank to support the economic efforts that need to happen there and what more can we do?

Secretary BLINKEN. This is another very significant challenge and the reality is—without sugarcoating it—is that the economy is in a tailspin, and you have got vacancies in the presidency, in the cabinet.

Parliament needs to actually elect a president. That is long in the making form of government, and on that basis, be able to actually implement the reforms that were necessary to secure an IMF program.

In part, there is a chicken-egg problem here between the necessary movement on the political side and what we believe is vital

on the economic side. It really is, as best we can tell, the only way out, the only way to pull back from the precipice.

I do not see an international bailout coming. I really think the IMF program is critical, but to get to the IMF program you have got to have a government in place. At the same time, we have been a very significant donor of assistance.

We continue to focus on livelihood support for two critical institutions, the Lebanese Armed Forces and the internal security forces. These are the state guarantors of Lebanon's sovereignty and they have been incredibly challenged.

The value of the dollar equivalent and salary to a member of the Lebanese Armed Forces has declined by 90 percent. Their purchasing power has basically gone to zero. That is what we have been trying to shore up.

It is really important that these institutions stay and stick together. It is critical for the state and of course, it is critical to push back against Hezbollah, trying to say no, we are going to do that because these institutions cannot.

We are very, very focused there and we, of course, have also been focused on some energy agreements that we are working to do and there are a number of challenges that come with those, but I think there is at least some hope on the energy supply side that we are very actively working on, but this is usually a challenge.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.

Senator SHAHEEN. Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN. Senator Scott.

Senator SCOTT. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Secretary, thanks for being here today. It has certainly been a long day for you at least, listening to all the questions that you are receiving today. I know that Dr. Barrasso spent some time talking about fentanyl and the crisis that we have as a nation. Last month at this hearing—at a hearing here, I had an opportunity to talk about a friend of mine, a former business school dean at the College of Charleston, whose son, Allen Child, his namesake, lost his life to fentanyl on the first use, and it is hard to think about this crisis simply by thinking about the numbers.

Over 70,000 other American families have had a similar experience. These are fathers, brothers, sisters, daughters, all lost because of fentanyl, and I know that you spoke sometime with Dr. Barrasso about the importance of Mexico and precursors from China and the approach that we should take with the Mexican cartels.

I would like for you to illuminate some of the work that we are doing because as I look through the budget I do not see—I see a lot in the form of technical assistance, but I do not see a lasting commitment to confronting this challenge.

Secretary, I know that you know that just a few weeks ago a few South Carolinians were kidnapped and some died at the hands of the Mexican cartels. We take this issue seriously as a nation, but at home this is a sensitive and serious issue.

I would like to know what we are doing from an all-of-government approach, not simply your Department, but seeing it from a panoramic view, number one. Number two, what else can be done with Mexico?

Number three, I know that there are times when fentanyl could literally be shipped from China straight to America. What can we do to cut that off?

Secretary BLINKEN. Thank you very much, Senator, and I could not—look, could not agree with you more. I deeply share this concern and I think you are exactly right that it is so important to put a name and a face to it because these numbers become abstractions and hopefully we would be galvanized by the fact that it is the number-one killer of Americans aged 18 to 49.

It does come down to these individual stories, and I also fully agree with you that we have to have and I believe we do have a comprehensive approach that—here at home I mentioned we are of course working as we always need to on the demand side, on the treatment side, on the antidote side. That is vitally important, but of course that does not answer the problem. It is a necessary component of it.

Second, we talked a little bit about this with Senator Barrasso. On the border itself, we do have good technology that can better detect the efforts to smuggle pills that are produced in Mexico and brought over the border because 95 percent of this is coming through legal ports of entry. It is not being smuggled across points of the border that are in between points of entry, but at the points of entry. There is the technology that can better detect that. Third—

Senator SCOTT. Mr. Secretary, on that point—

Secretary BLINKEN. Please.

Senator SCOTT. —is there is a high utilization of the technology that we have?

Secretary BLINKEN. I think it is, as I understand it, and this is not—I do not want to speak—try to speak authoritatively because it is beyond my area of expertise.

Senator SCOTT. Yes.

Secretary BLINKEN. As I understand it, we have been working as a government over several years now over a couple of administrations to deploy this technology. It has been a little slower than I think everyone would have liked. It is now speeding up, and, in fact, there was a very interesting piece, I think, a week or two ago in the Washington Post laying out some of the work that is being done.

We need to press the accelerator on that because the technology is effective. When I was last in Mexico with President Biden, one of the things that we talked about with President López Obrador was the deployment of this technology as well on the Mexican side of the border, so that is two.

Three, to your point, we have to press even harder on the accelerator in the work that we are doing jointly and supporting Mexico in doing in breaking up these cartels, breaking up the finance networks, taking down the labs.

Of course, it is not just the precursors of the pills themselves. It is the pill presses that are fabricated—

Senator SCOTT. Yes.

Secretary BLINKEN. —and that come across, all that.

Now, in fairness, they are making a very significant effort and they have put far more resources into this. They have actually done

an effective job in disbanding, disrupting labs, but—and arresting dozens of high-ranking officials in these cartels, but these labs, as you know, can fit in a room—

Senator SCOTT. And pop back up.

Secretary BLINKEN. Yes, just pop back up, so that is a challenge. There is another—one last thing. I know—I do not want to at this time.

Senator SCOTT. Two questions with 2 minutes left, so if you could wrap up.

Secretary BLINKEN. Yes, very quickly.

The other big piece I mentioned is internationally, one of the big problems is the diversion of perfectly legal precursors into illicit use and making fentanyl.

We have seized the G-20, the largest economies in the world. We just had a foreign ministers meeting. I got put on the agenda as an action item for the G-20 building out a coalition to try to deal more effectively with this, and what does that mean?

It means simply among other things that working with the private sectors in all of these countries, we do a better job. Sharing information about diversion, getting better labeling on legal precursors that then get diverted, and making sure that there is a program in place so that you know your customer.

If you are shipping a chemical you actually know where it is going. You put all of these pieces together I think you can have a greater impact.

Senator SCOTT. Thank you.

According to the recent report from the IAEA, Iran is getting dangerously close to having weapons grade plutonium. Last month the agency reported the discovery of uranium particles enriched up to 84 percent, 6 percent below the threshold necessary to create a nuclear weapon.

Given the regime's brutal crackdown against peaceful protesters and their efforts to sabotage negotiations to most people in the room it seems clear that negotiating a new JCPOA should be completely off the table, from our perspective. I hope that is yours as well.

What practical steps are you taking to work with our allies and partners to actually address this threat, especially given the fact that certain sanction requirements are about to lapse?

Secretary BLINKEN. Thank you.

Well, as a practical matter the JCPOA is not on the table at this moment in large part because as we were working in good faith to see if we could get a mutual return to compliance by Iran and by the United States, the Iranians rejected a proposal that was on the table put forward by the European Union, by our European partners, actually endorsed even by Russia and China.

They rejected that last summer and they have not demonstrated seriousness. That we are determined one way or another that Iran not acquire a nuclear weapon. I have to tell you, we continue to believe that in terms of getting an effective result, diplomacy is still the most effective way to do that, but it takes two to tango, as we would say, and the Iranians have not demonstrated seriousness of purpose.

Meanwhile, we are working in close concert with allies and partners. I was talking about this little bit earlier. I think we now have a much more shared perspective on this challenge.

I think minds have also been galvanized by what has happened in the streets of Iran over the last 6 or 9 months by the provision by Iran to Russia of drone technology for the war of aggression against Ukraine. All of that has brought countries closer together and trying to deal with some of these egregious actions.

Senator SCOTT. I know I am out of time, but a short question. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Secretary BLINKEN. I will try and be short.

Senator SCOTT. U.S. embassies in Africa, there is a shortage of staff. What are you doing about it and, frankly, you think about the CCP and as issues in its growth through its Belt and Road projects seems like we need to have more focus on Africa than we have.

I know that you have had some work with the African Leaders Summit. Would love to hear your thoughts on, A, the shortage and, B, strategy.

Secretary BLINKEN. Yes. Thank you. This is something we are very actively working on. The shortage is a problem. Actually, in the budget, we have increased dollars for additional hires that will help in part. It will not solve the problem, but it will help address the problem.

We are also reviewing why some of our posts do not receive sufficient bids because, as you know, the way this works in part is our Foreign Service officers say, hey, here is where I want to go, and we have seen in a number of countries the bids just are not there.

We are trying to understand why that is and then to see what we can do to incentivize people to serve in posts that, for one reason or another, have not been attracting the personnel they deserve.

Senator SCOTT. Thank you.

Secretary BLINKEN. Thank you.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.

Senator Cardin.

Senator CARDIN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Secretary, it is always a pleasure to have you before the committee. Thank you very much for your service.

Let me start with an issue that Senator Menendez raised in his opening comments and that is the capacity of the State Department to meet the challenges that we have globally.

I think never in our history have we had so many global challenges in which the work of the State Department can be critically important for us achieving our objectives.

Senator Hagerty and I have worked together in regards to the State Department's capacity to deal with these issues. We made several recommendations in the last Congress that were enacted into law.

I know that you have been questioned on this before the Appropriations Committee, but I want to get our committee engaged on these issues as well.

In that recommendations, some were more short-term changes that we thought should be made as quickly as possible, including

dealing with the training capacity at State Department by having a board of visitors, by making it a more professional educational experience, by expanding training opportunities. We thought these are proposals that could be implemented in the short term.

Others were longer-term issues and that is why we recommended a commission which is now in the process of being named and I would like to get your understanding about how to implement these changes.

They were done, I think, with full support and cooperation from the leadership at the State Department. We know you always have challenges. Part of this is going to be budgetary. For people to go into training you have to be able to backfill those positions. That is not always available.

Tell me how you think you can use the tools that we made available in the last Congress to implement these changes and what we can do to help you moving forward?

Secretary BLINKEN. Well, first, let me just say how much I appreciate the work that you have done on this and the leadership on it. It is hugely important to the future of the Department.

It is hugely important to our ability to attract, but also retain the best talent and we are in a competition for talent and we need to make sure that we have the tools not just to recruit people, but to make sure that they stay at the Department.

I think a big part of that is career-long learning because, as we have been talking about in many ways, things are changing so fast that unless you are able to as an institution make sure that your people have the ability to continuously upgrade their game, you are not going to be able to do the job.

Now, I think some of the tools, authorities, resources provided by Congress to us are making a big difference. For example, over the last couple of years and now in our budget I hope that will be realized this year, we have been able to hire a significantly greater number of people, both Foreign Service officers as well as civil servants.

That has tremendous benefits, one of which, of course, is making sure that when we have gaps in places we have the personnel to fill them, but one of the most critical, I think, initiatives we are taking is making sure that we have a significant float of personnel by which we can pull out of day in, day out, service someone, put them into a training program of some kind, whether it is one that we are doing ourselves, time at an academic institution, time, by the way, here in Congress and do it in a way that does not disrupt the day in, day out, activities of the Department. That is a big initiative. We now have real resources to do that in ways we never had before.

Second, you talked about the short term. I could not agree more. We just spent a morning with the Foreign Service Institute leadership on new programs they are putting in place for both incoming, but also mid-career learning, particularly in areas that the Department has not in the past usually been focused on and where we need to have critical skills and have people develop them.

You will see and we will share with you, I think, some very significant initiatives that are creating important opportunities for ca-

reer-long learning developed by the Foreign Service Institute that we will be actually implementing very, very soon.

There are a host of things that I think will make a real difference. I think the moving out on the Board of Visitors, on the provost, we are doing that. We are preparing actually the position description for the provost as we speak so that we can begin the hiring process.

We are actually leveraging the results of some, I think, important assessments in terms of what we are looking for and what we need, and we are on track to have the Board of Visitors identified and recruited by the end of this year.

Senator CARDIN. In regards to the commission, some are appointed by the Congress, but some are appointed by the Administration. Is that advancing on the Administration side?

Secretary BLINKEN. Yes, and I think not only is it advancing, I believe that we have asked actually your respective teams for recommendations and we really look to that, and I also believe that we actually have the resources even within our existing authorities to move forward on that.

Senator CARDIN. Part of this in-training deals with an area that I have talked about frequently with you and that is our anti-corruption efforts. The President has talked about that as a national security core concern.

We find that one of the resistance we get to being more active in establishing international standards on corruption is the capacity of our missions, particularly in country, to be able to evaluate and move forward on anti-corruption programs. Are you taking steps to improve the capacity at the State Department to deal with this priority area?

Secretary BLINKEN. Yes. We have really elevated this. As you know, we put in place a senior official who is charged with this responsibility and one of the things that I have been working on and I think it is important across the institution is we do a lot as an institution that is top-down. We do some that is bottom-up. Probably need to do more.

Where we really need to be doing more is horizontally across the institution, by which I mean this. On anti-corruption this needs to be embedded horizontally in all of our different bureaus in our regional bureaus, but also as well in some of our functional bureaus.

What I have been pushing is for the senior official and his team responsible for dealing with anti-corruption to be engaged on the takeoff, not just on the landing, with different colleagues across the enterprise so that they have the focus and they also dedicate the time and resources within their areas of responsibility to making combating corruption one of their responsibilities.

I think we are making progress there. I am sure we can do more, but I am very seized with this mission because something that you have been leading on for many, many years it is—there are few things that are more corrosive of democratic systems than corruption.

Senator CARDIN. Thank you. Thank you for your leadership.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.

Senator Hagerty.

Senator HAGERTY. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I am going to take a minute for my National Security Adviser Bobby Zarate to put up a photo, a photo that concerns me very much and I am certain it does you as well, Mr. Secretary, probably all of us here.

It is a photo of CCP diplomat Wang Yi with Iranian and Saudi officials. It is not a good thing. It is the anti-Abraham Accords, in my view. What it is doing is it depicts the normalization of relations with Iran rather than our ally, Israel. It is certainly not a situation that I think that Saudi Arabia and Iran would have come to of their own accord.

My question to you, Mr. Secretary, is what exactly did the Communist China promise to Saudi Arabia and to Iran to get them to come to this agreement?

Secretary BLINKEN. Senator, I think there is a back story here and I think it is, in some sense, a little bit more complicated. The Saudis and the Iranians have been talking for the better part of the last couple of years, including in Oman, including in Baghdad, to look to see if they could get back to where they were before they interrupted their diplomatic relations.

You remember the Saudis put to death a prominent Shi'a cleric. That resulted in a protest or storming of the Saudi Embassy in Tehran. They broke off diplomatic relations, I think, back in 2016.

In the last couple of years, not a couple of months, they have been looking to see if they could get back to a slightly more normal place, and based on the information we have, I think what China did, in a sense, cleverly, was to at the very end of that process take advantage of the work that these countries have done and then basically host the conclusion of the agreement that they reached to restore diplomatic relations.

Not to bring it together themselves. They just happened to be the host of it, and I think it sent a diplomatic signal. There is no doubt about that.

I have to say, I see some positives to this as well as some concerns. The positives are these. If, and there is a big if here because we really do not know if the commitments made under this agreement will actually be implemented. That really remains to be seen and we have seen in the past that Iran has promised to do things that, of course, it has not done.

If they do and, principally, if they cease or reduce their support to the Houthi rebels in Yemen, who, among other things, are attacking Saudi Arabia and helping to perpetuate a war on Yemen, if that stops or decreases, that can be beneficial.

It can be beneficial to ending the war in Yemen. It can be beneficial to helping defend or make sure that Saudi Arabia is not under attack. There are 80,000 Americans in Saudi Arabia. We have an interest in that, too.

It is a long way of saying if this results in the curbing of some of Iran's malicious activities, I actually do not think that is a bad thing.

By the way, it does not in any way substitute for our determination to pursue the deepening as well as the expansion of the Abraham Accords. I had a long discussion with Prime Minister Netanyahu about this when I was recently in Israel. We are very

focused on that, and I also do not think it will change the interests of other countries in pursuing that.

Senator HAGERTY. To go back to the photo itself, though, I think the image itself suggests to me that China may be trying to pull our ally, Saudi Arabia, into their orbit along with Russia and Iran.

It also suggests to me that China may be laying the groundwork for a petroyuan environment—to replace the petrodollar. I think this is something that would benefit from a deeper conversation with you, perhaps a conversation in closed session and I might ask the chairman and ranking member if we could arrange that at some point soon. I think that would be beneficial.

I would like to show another image that is also quite concerning. This is an image of CCP General Secretary Xi Jinping and Russian President Vladimir Putin who recently held high profile meetings in Moscow. This is also not a good thing.

In a video released overnight, Chairman Xi tells Putin that Communist China and Russia are going to be pushing for changes not seen for 100 years, and I would like to know, Mr. Secretary, what changes not seen for 100 years is Xi Jinping talking about and would that be detrimental to U.S. national security interest? What impact would those changes have on U.S. national security interests?

Secretary BLINKEN. I think it is no secret that both countries have a very different worldview than our own or, for that matter, a different worldview than dozens and dozens of our allies and partners around the world and, in particular, they have a different view of what a world order and rules of the road should look like than we do.

I think when it comes to China they actually want a world order, but an illiberal one. We continue to stand strongly for a liberal one. I am not sure that Russia or Vladimir Putin wants a world order, maybe more like world disorder, but in part as a result of having this very different worldview than we do, they have a marriage of convenience. I am not sure if it is conviction. Russia is very much the junior partner in this relationship and we have seen that again on display quite literally right here before us.

Recall, as you know, right before the Russian aggression against Ukraine they had a meeting, they talked about a partnership with no limits and we have seen further expression of that, but as they have been doing this, we have been over the last 2 years reenergizing, rejuvenating, reengaging all of our alliances and partnerships and in ways that are paying tremendous dividends, both in dealing with the Russian aggression against Ukraine and in dealing with some of the challenges posed by China.

We have greater convergence today with allies and partners in Europe as well as in Asia on how to deal with those challenges than we have had in—certainly, in my memory, and besides doing that we have also created new collections, new coalitions of countries, that are kind of more fit for purpose on individual issues.

I mentioned earlier the Mineral Security Partnership where we are getting countries together.

Senator HAGERTY. I am going to have to—just because of time I have to go to my next question, but this is a topic we have discussed in the past. I know you have discussed it with my col-

leagues today and that has to do with fentanyl and the ravages that it is creating on America.

We spoke about this a year ago and since we spoke about it, how many sanctions have been placed on Chinese individuals or entities that are involved in the fentanyl trade?

Secretary BLINKEN. What we have been working—the aspect of China that is deeply problematic, as you know, when it comes to fentanyl is the production in China precursors that get—that then become used in the production of fentanyl and we have had sought to try to get China to, in a cooperative way because it is actually in their interest to do this, to deal more effectively in cracking down on the diversion of those precursors.

Senator HAGERTY. Let me interrupt just in the interest of time.

I understand you have sought to do so, but it has not worked and, in fact, there have been zero sanctions issued since you and I talked about this.

How hard would it be for President Biden to pick the phone up and call President Xi Jinping tomorrow and lay out a set of consequences including sanctions that are going to be delivered upon China if they do not stop sending fentanyl and fentanyl precursors here to kill our youth?

Seventy thousand young people a year are dying of this, 23 times the deaths associated with the 9/11 attacks. This is a war on our youth. We have got to do something about it, Mr. Secretary.

Secretary BLINKEN. Like you, I am very seized with this including in my own engagements with Chinese counterparts and Chinese officials.

We have made very clear to them that we need to see this cooperation on dealing with synthetic opioids and fentanyl and if that cooperation is not forthcoming, we are going to have to look at other steps that we can take.

What want to do is to make sure that we are being as effective as possible. One of the challenges when it comes to, as I mentioned, China is that what often happens is perfectly, as you know, legal chemicals, precursors, get diverted either intentionally or unintentionally, in some cases, to the illicit production of fentanyl.

There are agreements, systems, procedures that we want to put in place, which is why I seized the G-20 with this just a few weeks ago and now have agreement from the G-20, which includes China, leading countries' economies in the world, to work on this together.

For example, much better information sharing, labeling, know your customer, so that at least when it comes to the unintentional diversion of these precursors, we are doing something about that.

Now, if it is intentional, that of course is a different matter.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.

Senator HAGERTY. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The CHAIRMAN. Senator Van Hollen.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Secretary, good to see you this afternoon. I thank you for your testimony this morning in Appropriations and for the benefit of Chairman Menendez I thank the Secretary for the implementation of the Foreign Service Families Act that we passed a couple years ago and, Mr. Chairman, thank you for your help in getting that through the United States Congress.

We also discussed the meeting took place that was just portrayed in this photograph between Putin and Xi, and, Mr. Secretary, you underscored what I think is an imperative that we be prepared, fully prepared, if China provides material military support to Russia to work in concert with our allies to immediately impose very tough economic sanctions and I know work is being done to make sure we are ready to do that.

I understand the issue of the critical minerals security partnership was raised here so I will not go over that. I do want to follow-through on a couple issues that were raised at this morning's hearing, one by my colleague, Senator Schatz, on the issue of press freedom, because I appreciate very much the State Department Human Rights Report and I appreciate the fact that it is insulated, I think, to the extent possible and pretty well from political forces.

I know what a challenge that is. I do want to just raise concerns about crackdown on freedom of the press in two countries where I hope we will continue to have strong relations with.

One is a country I have spent a lot of time in, a member of the Quad, and that is India. If you look at recent reports, there is a significant crackdown on press freedom in India. It is the world's largest democracy, but this is very, very troubling.

The other is neighboring Pakistan, which at times has had a very vibrant press, but right now we are seeing a critical crackdown and I just want to point out that the State Department Human Rights Report, which was just released Monday, indicates that both India and Pakistan have seen increasing threats on press freedom.

Both countries are increasingly dangerous places for journalists trying to do their jobs, and the State Department is not alone in this. Other organizations that are out there to protect freedom of the press have indicated both these countries have serious problems. Reporters Without Borders ranks India 150 out of 180 and Pakistan 157 out of 180.

I am not going to go into great detail today, but I am interested in following-up with you and your team on those issues.

I do want to pick up on our earlier conversation today about some concerning actions taken by the Government of Israel as we work to try to create a period of time where we can deescalate and this morning you agree that the recent action taken by the Knesset really just yesterday that rolled back the agreement made more than 20 years ago by Israel to evacuate four settlements was inconsistent with the obligations that the Government of Israel has taken on in Aqaba and Sharm-el-Sheikh, and I think we need to press those issues on both sides whenever we see violations of this agreement.

I do want to talk about certain elements of the new government, which are really extreme forces within this government. One of them is Ben-Gvir. The other is Smotrich. Ben-Gvir is—and these are not backbenchers. They are not backbenchers. They have very important responsibilities within this new government.

Ben-Gvir is the Minister of National Security in charge of state-wide law enforcement and the Israeli police. Smotrich is the Minister of Finance and also, as you know, minister in the Defense Ministry that has authority over civilian issues in the West Bank,

including illegal construction and authority over planning and construction for settlements.

Just a few days ago, Smotrich commented as follows, that there is no such thing as Palestinians because there is no such thing as a Palestinian people.

This was condemned by Biden administration officials and, Mr. Secretary, you are here today. Do you join in condemning that comment?

Secretary BLINKEN. I do.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. This is not the first time that Smotrich made these very incendiary comments, incitements to violence. It was just a few weeks ago where he stated in reference to the Palestinian village of Hawara that it needs to be, “wiped out,” and that, “the state of Israel should do it.”

Now, I agree with President Biden as a longtime supporter of the U.S.-Israel relationship that it has been built on interests and built on values.

You have to agree, Mr. Secretary, that those comments by Smotrich, the Minister of Finance, and somebody who has an important portfolio over the West Bank, those do not reflect our values, do they?

Secretary BLINKEN. They do not, and I would also point out that the second comment you alluded to on Hawara, Prime Minister Netanyahu insisted that the person in question walk those comments back, which he did, for what that is worth.

I would also note that the legislation you referred to which, again, we think is indeed inconsistent with commitments made and in fact inconsistent with long standing commitments because those were commitments undertaken, I believe, during the Bush administration.

My understanding is that Prime Minister Netanyahu has said that they have no intention of actually—the government—this was a Knesset law—has no intention of actually moving forward on the authorities that it has been apparently given.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. Okay.

Mr. Secretary, all of this raises the issue that Prime Minister Netanyahu says he has two hands on the steering wheel, meaning that he is in control of this government, but we are looking at actions his ministers are taking and actions in portfolios that are very significant that go directly contrary to that, and Prime Minister Netanyahu, as we discussed this morning, specifically himself disavowed the agreement reached in Aqaba within 24 hours of it having been reached.

I just go back to make my final point I did this morning, which is I appreciate the statements that have been made by Biden administration officials. I think, Mr. Secretary, it is important for you personally also to continue to speak out and I think we look weak when we see time after time actions taken inconsistent with our positions with no consequence at all.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.

Senator Cruz.

Senator CRUZ. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Secretary, welcome.

Secretary BLINKEN. Senator, good to see you.

Senator CRUZ. You have spoken passionately and I believe honestly about your commitment to helping Ukraine to defeat Vladimir Putin. I agree wholeheartedly that it is an important national security interest of the United States for Russia to lose.

Putin as a KGB thug who seeks to reassemble the Soviet empire at the expense of American interest and at the expense of the safety and security of Americans, and of course in China, Xi is watching closely to see how America responds to Putin's aggression.

I am deeply concerned, however, that no matter how much you may want to help Ukraine, there is something the Biden administration wants more, which is to reenter a nuclear agreement with Iran.

This Administration has shown weakness on Iran since day one and continues to do so. Just in the last few weeks there have been reports that you again waived congressional sanctions to allow Iraq to move money to the Central Bank of Iran, which the Ayatollah uses for terrorism, for ballistic missile development, and nuclear weapons work.

Of course, that is not all Iran is doing. In January, Mr. Secretary, you publicly assessed that Iran had become "Russia's top military backer." That is a quote. Indeed, Russia uses Iranian banks and tankers and planes to move weapons and to dodge sanctions.

Yet, the Administration and the State Department in particular continue to allow Russia-Iranian cooperation out of a refusal to crack down on Iran. The Biden administration is boosting and, in many cases, funding both sides of this war. If you look at energy—and I want to start with this. I want to ask you about the use by Russia of Iranian oil tankers.

As you know, Iran violates U.S. energy sanctions by using its own tankers as well as a ghost fleet of foreign flag ships. You have allowed that ghost fleet to grow dramatically. The Iranians were using about 70 tankers when President Biden was elected. Today, they are using about 300 tankers.

You did not sanction those tankers. Instead, the Administration allowed Iran to restore its energy exports, getting above 1 million barrels a day, which is funding the regime and funding the war on Ukraine.

Last month was the highest oil exports Iran has had since 2018. Now, we can argue about what that means for Iran, but I want to ask what it means for Ukraine and for Russia.

Russia is now using dozens and dozens of tankers from that ghost fleet that the Administration allowed to grow in violation of our energy sanctions directly to aid Putin's aggression in Ukraine.

Why has the Biden administration not sanctioned them?

Secretary BLINKEN. Senator, two things. First, going back to the first point, the symbiotic relationship that we are seeing emerge between Iran and Russia to include the provision by Iran of drone technology to Russia for use in Ukraine and the provision by Russia to Iran or the threatened provision of weapons systems, including planes, this is something that we are very actively and aggressively working to break up.

Across the government we have gone after the drone network, working to sanction dozens of individuals——

Senator CRUZ. Have you reimposed the oil sanctions?

Secretary BLINKEN. We are looking at the most effective way we can to the ghost fleet.

Senator CRUZ. Have you reimposed the oil sanctions?

Secretary BLINKEN. We have imposed sanctions across the entire UAV network. We are looking at how we can most effectively deal with the ghost fleet and also the——

Senator CRUZ. Have you stopped the Ayatollah from selling a million barrels a day of oil?

Secretary BLINKEN. We are working on making sure that we can do that effectively.

Senator CRUZ. It was done in the prior Administration. It was this Administration that refused to enforce those sanctions that allowed billions of dollars to flow to the Ayatollah that is being used to attack the Ukrainians right now.

Secretary BLINKEN. We are working every day to enforce the existing sanctions on Iran even as we are looking at imposing new ones, and at the same time——

Senator CRUZ. Mr. Secretary, with respect, that is not remotely true. The oil sanctions you could enforce tomorrow, but it is a political decision not to enforce it and you are providing the funds that Iran is using to provide drones that are attacking Ukrainian military, attacking Ukrainian civilians.

You said you just noticed recently the growing cooperation between Russia and Iran. If you were not aware of that 2 years ago, this Administration has not been paying attention.

Let us talk, for example, about Russia and Iranian nuclear cooperation. President Zelensky has repeatedly said that Russia is compensating Iran for weapons through nuclear cooperation.

Last year you signed waivers specifically related to the Iran nuclear deal that suspended congressional sanctions against Russia and Iran conducting exactly this kind of nuclear cooperation.

You recently renewed these waivers. President Zelensky is right. You know that so much so that in your recent transmissions you wrote to Congress that previous waivers you had issued, “would expand Iran’s nuclear programs and further deepen cooperation between Iran and Russia at a time that Iran is providing lethal aid to Russia for its use and its illegal invasion in Ukraine.”

You did not cancel the waivers. Instead, you signed them, enabling broad Russia-Iranian nuclear cooperation. Why did you sign these waivers and why did you do so repeatedly?

Secretary BLINKEN. These waivers have been in the nonproliferation interests of the United States, particularly to make sure that materials that Iran could use to develop its nuclear program were shipped out of Iran and to make sure that facilities in Iran would not be developed in a way that could lead to further proliferation or the advancement of the program.

In the last instance, we have narrowed the waivers significantly, again, to make sure that they are focused only on activities that actually advance our nonproliferation goals to make sure that Iran——

Senator CRUZ. Mr. Secretary, with all due respect, that answer does not does not pass the laugh test. Under this Administration, you have allowed Iran to get to the brink of a nuclear weapon. There is no work being conducted to make the program safer.

Russia is on the side of Iran and Iran is on the side of Russia. They are both against us, and it is staggering that the Biden administration would say Russia is still on our side trying to constrain Iran.

You could halt this cooperation. You could halt the civilian nuclear cooperation with Russia. You could halt the oil sales, but this Administration is not willing to do so because of politics and as a result the billions of dollars the Ayatollah is getting because of your decisions and President Biden's decisions are funding the war in Ukraine.

Why is this Administration funding both sides of this war?

Secretary BLINKEN. I fundamentally disagree with that judgment, Senator. We had Iran's nuclear program in a box. Unfortunately, it got out of that box as a result of pulling out, not by us, of the nuclear agreement.

As a result, despite the maximum pressure that has been exerted by the previous Administration, by our Administration.

Senator CRUZ. Would you answer the question I asked? Why are you funding both sides of the war?

Secretary BLINKEN. That nuclear program has moved forward—

Senator CRUZ. Would you answer the question? Why are you funding both sides of the Ukraine war?

Secretary BLINKEN. We are not funding both sides. We are trying to make sure wherever we can that we are pushing back on Iran having access to resources—

Senator CRUZ. You are not going to stop the oil sales?

Secretary BLINKEN. We are looking at the most effective way to deal with these—

Senator CRUZ. Enforce the sanctions. It is not complicated.

The CHAIRMAN. Senator Booker.

Senator BOOKER. Mr. Secretary, it is good to see you and I want to thank you, again, for having members of this committee over to the State Department. I thought it was a really productive conversation.

I just want to jump in, first and foremost, just about food security in general. The Black Sea Grain Initiative was extended on March 18. It gives me a lot of hope, but for only 60 days, unfortunately, and half of that time period stipulated, really, in the original agreement makes me have some concerns.

Relief agencies themselves, as you know, have been expressing disappointment in the shortened duration, stressing that a lot of the countries in East Africa will be entering the lean season and have a lot of crises.

I know negotiations to allow for the safe passage of commercial ships carrying Ukrainian agricultural exports from the Black Sea have really been facing challenges. We know that the Russians are doing a lot of things to slow down the processes. They have created backlogs and there has been a significant drop. I know you are aware of all this.

Can you just help me better understand the importance of the Black Sea Grain Initiative, how the Administration is working to ensure Russia fully meets its obligations, and have you started work with other countries dependent upon Russia and Ukraine grain to become more food sovereign and independent?

Secretary BLINKEN. Yes. A couple of things. Thank you, Senator, for raising that.

It is hard to overstate the importance of the Black Sea grain corridor. As you know well, Ukraine had been, before the Russian aggression, one of the main breadbaskets of the world including Africa, and the—one of the results of the Russian aggression, of course, was to disrupt significantly its export of grain, of wheat.

The Black Sea grain corridor has been a—it never should have been necessary in the first place because it was only necessary because Russia was blocking exports out of Ukraine, blocking the port of Odessa, but once put in place was a significant success, getting out about 24 million metric tons of grain from Ukraine, the equivalent of 8 billion loaves of bread. The vast majority of that was going to the Global South. It has had a direct impact.

By the way, when I was just in Ethiopia, I saw large bags—sacks of Ukrainian grain that were there as a result of the Black Sea grain corridor initiative.

It is imperative that it be sustained. There is a renewal, but the Russians continue to manipulate it and play with it. The number of ships, as you mentioned, that are actually allowed to go through, they have been playing games with so that the number of ships is smaller.

We are pushing every day on the U.N. and with the U.N. and others to make sure that not only is it sustained, but it is allowed to operate efficiently and effectively.

However, even with that we have been seized with the global food crisis and global food insecurity in two ways—and very quickly.

One is, of course, dealing with the emergency problem that so many countries are facing. Over the last year, we provided on top of what we were already doing an additional \$13.5 billion to advance food security around the world and to deal with emergency situations.

We are by far the largest donor to the World Food Programme. We provide about 20 percent of its budget.

Senator BOOKER. Do you think that the Fiscal Year 2024 request of—I think it is about \$5 billion, if I am getting this right—is that enough?

Secretary BLINKEN. I want to say at this point I believe it is, but this is a perfect storm in so many ways that could get worse. We want to make sure that we retain the flexibility. We have the Feed the Future program, which is dealing with the longer-term aspect of this, which is well funded, and is in the budget. This is helping countries actually build their own sustainable productive capacity, not just have to rely on emergency assistance.

Senator BOOKER. Can I dig deeper in your recent trip to Ethiopia?

Secretary BLINKEN. Yes.

Senator BOOKER. You said that both sides have been guilty, really, of war crimes. We see a nation that is going to have a lot of challenges ahead of it. Millions of people are in need of assistance right now and the security situation remains volatile and it will probably be contributed to that insecurity, will be the sheer needs of the populations.

I know the Administration is working with the U.N. and other partners to meet this unbelievable humanitarian crisis, but I guess what I want to ask you is are we putting enough resources? I guess the FY24 budget request—\$286 million for Ethiopia and \$331 million for new humanitarian assistance—I am just curious, as you engage with people on the ground, are we doing enough in terms of helping that country get up off its knees after this horrific crisis and humanitarian crisis?

Secretary BLINKEN. One, I believe that we are, but I also believe and hope that we will actually be able to do more and partly that is dependent on Ethiopia following through on the hugely important agreement that was reached for the cessation of hostilities in Tigray.

We were not erasing the last couple of years and, in fact, as you noted, we just announced the other day that it is our assessment that all sides have committed atrocities and we detail those.

The agreement that was reached has resulted in this. The guns are silent. The humanitarian assistance is flowing to the north. Services are being restored. The Eritreans have pulled back and are pulling out.

The TPLF has put down its heavy weapons. They are standing up an interim administration and there is the beginnings of a transitional justice process in place that Prime Minister Abiy is supporting and advancing.

What I told him when I saw him was as they move down this road and implement the very important decisions made that will allow us and presumably allow Congress to support greater renewed engagement with Ethiopia, greater renewed support both in terms of our own assistance programs, some of which—now, I will say despite the last 2 years when it comes to basic humanitarian assistance in Ethiopia, we have sustained virtually all of it.

There are other things that can be done on an economic level that would really benefit Ethiopia and as it travels this path of peace, of accountability, of reconciliation, we will be able to do that. The international financial institutions as well are looking at how they can reengage.

Senator BOOKER. Can I just really quickly—I know it is a priority for you—about diversity and inclusion. I really appreciate the conversations we have had since before you were even confirmed.

In July, a GAO report analyzing the Department's DEIA practices provided a lot of recommendations, in short. Can you speak to how the Department plans to continue to use the funding requested for the DEIA office and how the Department's implementation to these kind of priorities is going to go forward? Again, has the work that you have been doing in your retention unit informed your Department's budget request for priorities? Can you just give me some more?

Secretary BLINKEN. Yes. In fact, so the—and thank you for raising the retention unit.

First, let me just say very quickly this has been from day one—and it goes back, Mr. Chairman, to when this committee was good enough to confirm me—I made a commitment that I would be—I would see a marker of my success or not in this job whether or not the institution made real progress in building an institution that actually reflects the country that we are there to represent. This has been a priority of mine from day one.

We established the Office of the CDIO, the Chief Diversity Inclusion Office. Never had that before. Reports directly to me.

We have a 5-year strategic plan that was put in place. We have for the first time disaggregated data that looks across every office of the Department, so we have a clearer picture of where we are and where we are not.

We have senior officers from every bureau at the deputy assistant secretary level who are assigned to carry this portfolio in their bureaus from the very beginning of the pipeline to the end of the pipeline—that is, from recruitment all the way to promotion and advancement with retention in the middle.

We are intensely focused. We are trying to open more hearts and minds to the idea of serving in government and serving, hopefully, at the State Department.

I have done that directly myself, senior officials have. Retention, though, is a critical piece because what we found is we get people through the door at C Street, but then they do not stay and disproportionately the people who do not stay tend to be from groups that have been historically underrepresented at the Department.

We need to understand why and part of that was setting up a retention unit where we have been engaged in interviewing everyone who is willing, who is leaving the Department or thinking about leaving the Department, as well as doing statistical surveys, but the in-person interviews are really important to try to better understand this.

Just got the initial results from the first surveys and interviews that are very instructive and illuminating about what it is we can do better to make sure we are retaining people.

Then it is vital that people be promoted, that everyone in the Department sees that they can aspire to hold the highest jobs in the Department, and opening that process up with more transparency, especially at the senior levels, that is something we have done, too.

Let me just say very quickly one of the things I am grateful to the Congress for, is for the first time we have paid internships, as you know, at the State Department. That means that socio-economically we widen the aperture dramatically.

The enthusiasm for those has been through the roof, and based on the budget my hope and expectation is we will get over the next couple of years to having a thousand paid internships at the Department and that is making a huge difference.

We have put in place new fellowships that are designed to attract, again, underrepresented populations in the Department. We just named one after Colin Powell that we put together last year. We have another one that I think will further diversify the core of our Diplomatic Security Service, which is vitally important.

Anyway, it is a long way of saying there is a lot that is going on and it is something that I am absolutely seized with. I want to make sure that—the last thing I will say is the more we are able to institutionalize these initiatives so that they remain there long after I am gone and others are gone, that is usually important, too. We are looking at ways to do that effectively.

Senator BOOKER. It is tremendous work, and when it comes to naming fellowships after this hearing, you might want to name one after Ted Cruz. I am sure that would go a long way in bipartisan unity and support for the State Department's programs.

Secretary BLINKEN. Thank you, Senator.

Senator BOOKER. That is good, wise advice from a Jersey boy.

The CHAIRMAN. I am not going to follow on—on that.

[Laughter.]

The CHAIRMAN. Mr. Secretary, you have been very gracious with your time. I just want to close out on a couple of questions and then we will let you go.

What do you call a country that violates another country's airspace and territorial waters without provocations, drills in its exclusive—in another country's exclusive economic zone, that buys Russian military equipment in violation of U.S. law, that has more lawyers and journalists in jail than almost any other country and jails its main political opponent right before elections, a country that seeks by force to block the rights of a EU country to explore its energy deposits off its outer continental shelf, a country that not has only—not has joined EU-led sanctions against Russia, but has exported about \$800 million worth of goods to Russia, a country that continues airstrikes in Iraq and Syria, including against U.S. partners like the Syrian Democratic Forces, that stops a critical enlargement of NATO, that continues to occupy a EU country with 40,000 troops, and in violation of U.N. Security Council resolutions seeks to open up an area that has been frozen by the United Nations, that denies religious freedom to the religious leader of millions of citizens of Greek Orthodox faith, that converts a church into a mosque in violation of its UNESCO commitments and that arrests and jails U.S. embassy locally employed staff?

What do you call such a country?

Secretary BLINKEN. I think I would call that a challenging ally.

The CHAIRMAN. Well, I call the country Turkey and the reality is I do not believe that such a country—and I did not continue, which I could have—deserves to have F-16s sold to it.

I mean, I do not know what messages we send in the world that you can do all of those things and, yet, you can get U.S. military assistance, at the end of the day.

I know the aspiration we have for Turkey, but it is not the Turkey under President Erdogan, and so it seems to me there has to be a roadmap in which it says if you really want this then you have to deal with some of these issues because if we just give them the F-16s and all of this remains outstanding, I do not know what global message we send.

In a similar light, in the past year we have seen Azerbaijan invade Armenia, manufacture a food security crisis in Nagorno-Karabakh with its ongoing blockade, continue rampant repression

domestically including with the unjustified detention of activists like Bakhtiyar Hajiyev.

In the past 5 years we have seen Azerbaijan start a war that killed 6,500 people, forced almost 100,000 Karabakh Armenians from their homes.

I am concerned about providing assistance to the Aliyev regime, but it strikes me as particularly egregious that the Administration would request \$700,000 in international military education and training funds for Azerbaijan.

Can you explain to the American people why we would want to provide military education and training to an aggressor state that attacks its neighbors and violates the rights of its citizens?

Secretary BLINKEN. Senator, I know we have had opportunity to discuss this before. There are a few things here.

First of all, when it comes to the military assistance and particularly to the infamous Section 901 waiver that that we engage in, look, there are some very practical reasons for that.

One is to actually strengthen, as you know, the interoperability between their forces and ours, NATO's. They engage in peace-keeping. They have a long border with Iran that needs defending, but also to this point we think there is real benefit to increasing the Western education, maybe orientation, of some of their officers, so that is important.

Let me just step back and—

The CHAIRMAN. I hope that Western education is not what they have learned to do what they did in blockading these people, starting a conflict, 6,500 dead. That, I hope, is not Western education.

Secretary BLINKEN. Just to step back for one second because I do think this is an important moment and something that I think we should really also pursue the conversation on.

I have been very engaged on seeing what we can do to help Armenia and Azerbaijan come to a peace agreement that normalizes the relationship between them as well as deal with, obviously, the rights and protections for Armenian activists in Nagorno-Karabakh, dealing with border delimitation, et cetera, and I think there is an opportunity—I do not want to exaggerate it—but an opportunity actually to bring a peace agreement to fruition.

I had Prime Minister Pashinyan and President Aliyev together in Munich at the Security Conference. I have had the foreign ministers here in Washington. I expect that they will come back.

We have worked on a text, and this is not something that we are imposing on Armenia. We are answering the strong desire expressed by Armenia to see if we can help them reach an agreement which would end at least in many ways 30-plus years of conflict.

It is challenging and it is fraught. At the same time, you are exactly right to point out the real problems in the Lachin corridor with the ability of people, private citizens, commercial traffic, to flow to get what is needed to people in Nagorno-Karabakh. I am pressing on Azerbaijan including as recently as this week to reopen that corridor.

We are working on that, but I do think that there is without exaggerating it a moment of opportunity here that would profoundly be in the interests of the people of Armenia as well as Azerbaijan.

The CHAIRMAN. As we are aspiring to that, and that is a worthy aspiration, but I hope that we are committed to making sure that humanitarian assistance reaches the Karabakh Armenians in Nagorno-Karabakh.

Secretary BLINKEN. Yes.

The CHAIRMAN. I hope you use your good offices to make that happen.

Secretary BLINKEN. Yes.

The CHAIRMAN. Two last things. Your announcement of your determination related to war crimes and crimes against humanity in Ethiopia was well welcomed and I salute you for it. I, along with other senators, have been pushing for such a determination for 2 years.

I agree with your position that justice and accountability for the crimes committed during the course of the war are a fundamental element of a sustainable peace.

State Department officials have indicated that human rights monitors will have full and unfettered access to Tigray in the wake of the November agreements.

Will you commit to update your determination periodically as the monitors gather more information?

Secretary BLINKEN. Yes. We are tracking this, Mr. Chairman, every step along the way and the access for monitors is a vital part of this agreement.

The CHAIRMAN. Okay. That is great. Will any update include a finding related to the International Commission of Human Rights experts on Ethiopia's report from September of last year that, "The denial and obstruction of humanitarian access to Tigray region by the Federal Government and allied regional state governments was committed for the purpose of depriving the Tigrayan population of objects indispensable for its survival, including food?"

Secretary BLINKEN. Actually, I think that is reflected in our determination. If you look at the determination that we made, there are a number of different elements that apply.

Some do not apply to all of the actors in this and one of the things that is clear in the determination that we made was that, in effect, trying to cut off the population of Tigray from humanitarian access constituted a serious offense that we noted in our determination.

The CHAIRMAN. All right. We look forward to that.

I hope we will commit to supporting the extension of the mandate of the International Commission of Human Rights experts on Ethiopia as part of our effort.

Lastly, I want to echo Senator Booker's—as you know, I have had a nearly 30-year journey on diversity with the State Department. It has been most of the time rather lonely, most of the time unsuccessful, and so I appreciate the answer that you gave him.

I just hope that as we pursue that diversity, that this diversity is as broad as possible and that what we are doing in the budget, which seeks the recruitment and retention of an additional 164 Foreign Service and 351 civil service personnel is going to have these DEIA initiatives penetrating that effort as well.

Is that what your expectation is?

Secretary BLINKEN. Yes, and, in fact, we made changes to the Foreign Service exam to make sure that it was unintentionally, but as a practical matter actually being more of a barrier to diversification than it should be.

We have also, among other things, made working for advancing DEIA one of the criteria for promotion in the Department.

The CHAIRMAN. Okay. I look forward to holding a hearing later this year with the chief diversity and inclusion officer of the Department, which is in and of itself a good step. Of course, all of that only matters if we see change in numbers, which I appreciate from your answer to Senator Booker you are working on trying to make a reality.

Senator Risch had to leave, but he asked me on behalf of both of us to thank you. You have been very gracious with your time, very thorough in your answers.

This hearing record will remain open to the close of business on Wednesday, March 29. If there are questions for the record, please submit it no later than then.

With the thanks of the committee, this hearing is adjourned.
[Whereupon, at 5:18 p.m., the hearing was adjourned.]

ADDITIONAL MATERIAL SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD

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

Question. Democracy & Human Rights in the Indo-Pacific: The Administration's Indo-Pacific Strategy recognizes that to achieve our goals in the Indo-Pacific, a critical component of our increased engagement must focus on supporting democracy, human rights, rule of law, and support for international law. Yet none of the new staff positions requested related to the Indo-Pacific Strategy are slated to be in bureaus or positions working on these policy areas. How is your current budget seeking to strengthen the components of the State Department's workforce needed to address these important human rights and democracy components of the Indo-Pacific strategy and our global competition with China?

Answer. The State Department puts democracy, human rights, and governance at the center of U.S. foreign policy, including in the Indo-Pacific strategy and through global competition with the People's Republic of China. The FY 2024 budget request seeks increases for both regional and functional bureaus to improve the Department's ability to advance democracy, promote human rights, and improve governance in the Indo-Pacific. The request will allow for expanded programming, staffing increases both domestically and abroad, and enable the Department to sustain prior year increases in staffing.

Question. Staffing for the China Challenge: For years we have focused on the necessity of increasing resources to the Indo-Pacific, but I firmly believe that the challenge China poses is a global one and that we are behind the curve in places like Africa and the Western Hemisphere. One of the strategies that the Department has used to increase the focus on what China is doing around the world is the Regional China Officer (RCO) program. Although the program has grown, I understand that the Department has around 20 Regional China Officer (RCO) positions globally and that the China House administers the program out of a small four-person unit focused on the global aspects of the competition. What impact does the RCO program have on our awareness of, and ability to respond to, malign PRC activities globally?

Answer. The Regional China Officers are some of the Department's most critical nodes for understanding the PRC's global inroads. They have produced hundreds of reports and actively work to share and coordinate our insights with Department leadership, the interagency, and our allies and partners to align our collective responses to the PRC challenge. RCOs also build our global capacity to identify and respond to problematic PRC behavior through senior level briefings, regional conferences, and help shape and evaluate proposals for the Countering PRC Influence Fund.

Question. Are these officers connected to resources back in Washington to help us get ahead of troubling developments—such as economic coercion by the PRC—or to respond quickly and effectively when they occur?

Answer. The Regional China Officers (RCOs) are part of the Department’s Office of China Coordination (“China House”). Through China House and its extensive interconnectivity within the Department and beyond, RCOs have a robust network of partners and resources in Washington they routinely draw upon. The State Department’s Foreign Service Institute also provides training on China, including a new area studies program designed to enable U.S. foreign affairs professionals to apply a deeper understanding of PRC’s methods and strategies of exerting influence globally to their analysis and reporting.

Question. What more could be accomplished if this program was expanded, including to our multilateral missions?

Answer. An expansion of the RCO program could advance three major goals: ensure more comprehensive coverage in large regions (such as Africa where over 50 countries are covered by just three officers); allow focused engagement in capitals with particularly important allies such as Japan and the UK; and enhance our ability to respond to the PRC’s undermining of the multilateral system by embedding dedicated RCOs within our multilateral missions, where they could bring their China expertise and access to the knowledge and resources of the China Office of Coordination (“China House”).

Question. What is needed in terms of additional training and resources to make this program more effective?

Answer. The RCO program operates with less than \$1 million in 0.2 percent diplomatic program funding to cover all activities. While this provides the ability to sponsor trainings and travel in their region, its uses are limited. The RCOs benefitted from collaborating with the Office of the Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy for a one-time allocation of \$2 million in 0.7 (PD) funds in 2020 which funded over a dozen tailored programs, which continue to pay dividends. Even modest amounts of 0.2 funds, and/or a larger allotment of 0.7 funds for public diplomacy collaborations between Public Diplomacy Sections and RCOs, would greatly enhance the ability of RCOs to effectively partner with posts to push back PRC inroads. Additional RCO positions would also greatly increase impact.

Question. Please explain how these funds will contribute to our efforts to fully staff and resource our efforts in multinational fora like the IAEA, UN and elsewhere, where China is increasingly wielding influence.

Answer. The Regional China Officer (RCO) program seeks to raise awareness of PRC problematic behaviors globally, including in multilateral fora. Additional resources would enable the program to expand coverage into international organizations in Europe and elsewhere, giving us greater China expertise as we engage on PRC issues in these organizations.

Question. Taiwan FMF Financing: Last year, we were able to secure the Taiwan Enhanced Resilience Act (previously known as the Taiwan Policy Act) into the FY 2023 NDAA—designed to dramatically enhance the United States’ defense partnership with Taiwan by authorizing foreign military financing to modernize their security capabilities to deter and, if necessary, defeat aggression by the People’s Republic of China. The T.E.R.A explicitly authorized up to \$2 billion per year over the next 5 years for FMF for Taiwan, but most of our FMF assistance goes to countries in the Middle East. Why did the Administration not request a more ambitious increase in the topline FMF account—to properly fund the authorization provided by Congress while also increasing the State Department’s leadership and oversight over key security assistance accounts?

Answer. The Department appreciates the authorizations in the TERA of FMF grant assistance to Taiwan and continues to explore options for Taiwan. This request includes \$113 million to address emerging priorities globally, which may include Taiwan. A strategic allocation of FMF could be accomplished with increased flexibility within the annual appropriations bill.

Question. Retaliation against U.S. citizens/Transnational Repression: Mr. Turkel serves as Chairperson of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) and is seeking to be reunited with his mother in China. He has worked closely with my office on Uyghur issues. Chinese officials will not permit his ailing and widowed mother to travel to the U.S. to see her American children and meet her American grandchildren. I understand that you personally raised Mr. Turkel’s family case with your Chinese Government counterpart, but Mr. Turkel’s mother is

still unable to leave China, which is clearly a retaliation against a vocal U.S. citizen. It's brutal that Chinese authorities are retaliating against Mr. Turkel for his human rights work on behalf of Uyghurs, and service to the U.S. Government. Did the President raise Mrs. Turkel's case with Xi Jinping? What specifically is the Administration doing to prioritize this case and reunite this family?

Answer. In a meeting with President Xi on the margins of the Bali G20 Leaders' Summit, President Biden raised concerns about human rights, including the PRC's practices in Xinjiang. The Department raises priority cases with the PRC Government at the highest levels, including advocating for Ayshe Mamut to be reunited with Mr. Turkel and other family members.

Question. Humanitarian Assistance and Food Security: Global food insecurity continues to rapidly rise, fueled by Putin's invasion of Ukraine, climate change, and the COVID-19 pandemic. Current funds are insufficient, and worryingly, I have heard reports of WFP and its partners cutting food rations for vulnerable populations in Africa and elsewhere due to a lack of funding, including reports of impending or actualized ration cuts in Syria, in the West Bank and Gaza, Yemen and in the Rohingya refugee camps in Bangladesh. Please walk us through how this budget request, paired with last year's Ukraine supplemental requests, will address humanitarian funding needs to stabilize conditions in key parts of the world during this extraordinary moment of need?

Answer. Generous supplemental appropriations allowed the United States to scale up humanitarian assistance to meet unprecedented needs—especially in Ukraine and in the Horn of Africa—across FY 2022 and FY 2023. The FY 2024 request of \$6.5 billion for USAID-managed humanitarian assistance funding is an increase over base enacted appropriations for FY 2023. While we will continue to prioritize available resources for the most acute emergencies and needs, significant resources are needed to address unprecedented humanitarian needs worldwide. The U.S. Government continues to press other donors to increase humanitarian contributions.

Question. Human Rights and Democracy Fund: The funding requested for the Human Rights and Democracy Fund (HRDF) is \$180.7 million—a decrease from the FY23 enacted level of \$222.45 million. Could you elaborate how the State Department intends to address these critical issues with this funding level?

Answer. While the budget request for DRL's FY 2024 HRDF funding is less than the FY 2023 enacted level for HRDF, the overall USG Democracy, Human Rights, and Governance request level in FY 2024 did increase by \$250 million from the FY 2023 request. The Department employs a range of diplomatic and programmatic tools to address troubling democratic trends globally. Our resources, including HRDF, are used for targeted democracy and human rights programs that are designed to combat democratic erosion and other threats to democracy that operate in lockstep with our bilateral, multistakeholder, and bilateral initiatives.

Question. What resources are necessary to adequately address the multiple, competing crises related to democracy, governance, and human rights?

Answer. The Department employs a range of diplomatic, programmatic, and public diplomacy tools to support democracy, governance, and human rights globally. The level of resources included in the FY 2024 request will comprehensively fund these tools. As the lead for democracy, governance, and human rights, the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor (DRL) implements targeted foreign assistance programs to address human rights crises and to support democratic openings globally.

Question. For Afghanistan, given the fluidity of the situation on the ground, are there plans to pivot funding from previous programs supporting women/girls/gender to countries to where Afghans are fleeing, e.g., increasing INL/JTIP GBV and anti-TIP programs available to Afghan women/girls in Pakistan?

Answer. The Department rigorously reviews ongoing programming and prior year resources to adjust to the situation on the ground and provide support to women and girls inside and outside of Afghanistan. This includes emergency assistance, such as shelter and protection, for individuals facing threats of gender-based violence (GBV) and working with civil society organization on prevention of GBV. Outside of Afghanistan, the Department and USAID fund variety of scholarships and specialized training programs that create opportunities for women and girls to receive higher education.

Question. Supporting Democratic Partners in the Americas: Growing authoritarianism poses a grave threat to peace and security in our hemisphere. We already have three consolidated dictatorships in Cuba, Venezuela, and Nicaragua.

It is more imperative than ever that our remaining democratic partners in the hemisphere know that the United States stands with them. Given high rates of migration from those fleeing authoritarian regimes, violence, and economic decline, do you believe the proposed budget is sufficient to address the migration and refugee challenges in the region?

Answer. The FY 2024 budget request prioritizes addressing migration and refugee challenges in the region. In support of the 2022 Los Angeles Declaration on Migration and Protection, the request includes nearly \$274 million in assistance across all accounts, representing a significant increase to meet the outstanding needs of the region. Without these resources, the Department will be severely constrained given the global rise in humanitarian needs and refugee resettlement priorities.

Question. Deforestation in Amazon: The President's budget requests \$75 million for a new *Strengthening Forest Conservation and Land Management* fund to catalyze private sector financing in the sector. At an earlier hearing, however, Deputy Climate Envoy, Rick Duke, indicated that the need is far greater and more in line with what I've proposed in my AMAZON21 Act. Can you please explain how, if appropriated, the requested funds would be leveraged to tackle deforestation in Brazil and around the globe?

Answer. Funding will support actions to restore degraded or deforested landscapes; improve resilience; incentivize forest conservation and sustainable forest and land management; promote production practices consistent with environmental and social goals; and catalyze private sector investment and action, particularly in key areas for sustaining biodiversity and ecosystem function. As Deputy Envoy Duke noted, halting deforestation, and restoring intact and biodiversity rich ecosystems in Brazil and beyond will require significant collective action and support. A fund could be one component of a comprehensive USG approach in support of this objective.

Question. Moreover, what are the longer-term investment needs to halt and reverse global deforestation, an imperative that is critical to addressing the climate crisis?

Answer. The drivers of deforestation are complex and varied, as are the tools needed to combat deforestation. We need to improve, both at home and abroad, data analysis, project monitoring and evaluation, and promotion and enforcement of the rule of law as well as the quality, availability, and accessibility of land cover and land use change data. Finally, developing alternative livelihoods and energy sources, and improved agricultural productivity are essential to address deforestation's root causes. In addition, natural capital must be accounted for, and incentives must be shifted so that forests are worth more standing than deforested.

Question. Modernizing Diplomacy: This year's budget funds provisions put forward by our committee's FY22 State Authorization bill supporting the recruitment and retention of personnel with backgrounds in cybersecurity, engineering, data science, and other specialized skills or training needed to address 21st century challenges. Please describe the Department's current hiring efforts in this area. Does the Department require additional hiring authorities or funding to recruit personnel who are skilled in these disciplines?

Answer. The State Department leverages available hiring authorities to employ the specialized talent we need to advance our global mission. However, traditional recruitment mechanisms are slow and inefficient, hindering the Department's ability to expediently hire needed specialized foreign affairs skillsets in areas such as climate, economics, health, and cyber affairs. In addition, the new 10-year term Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) authority series does not include all desired government-wide STEM Direct Hire Authority series (e.g., all GS-2210 IT Specialists, GS-1560 Data Scientist, etc.). Department efforts to hire needed specialized skillsets would greatly benefit from an expansion of direct hire authority to additional STEM series and foreign affairs specialty series.

Question. Embassy Construction: GAO found that construction inflation contributed to slowing the pace of State's embassy construction program, which had only received one inflation adjustment in the past 20 years. (GAO-18-653) In accordance with a GAO recommendation, State assessed that inflation reduced its purchasing power by more than \$700 million. How many embassies or consulates still need to be replaced and, given the impact of continued inflation as well as other factors slowing the pace of construction, how many years does State estimate it will take to complete these new embassies and consulates?

Answer. Since the Capital Security Construction Program began in 2001, the Department has built 95 new embassies and consulates (NEC/NCC) with another 45

major construction projects already underway or planned for award by FY 2027. With a historical average timeline of 7 years for a NEC/NCC, we estimate it would take about 30 years to address the remaining facilities. However, we are reevaluating long-term solutions such as the collocation, reduced setback, and stay-in-place flexibilities offered by the Secure Embassy Construction and Counterterrorism Act 2022 as an alternative to new construction, which could reduce the timeline.

Question. Has State considered increasing its and other agencies' Capital Security Cost Sharing Program contributions so that requested funding keeps pace to some extent with inflation costs?

Answer. In the FY 2024 President's budget request, the Department, in coordination with the Office of Management and Budget, proposed increasing the Capital Security Cost Sharing Program contributions to address inflation. It requests an overall program level of \$2.4 billion, which is an increase of \$238.9 million from the FY 2023 overall cost sharing program level of \$2.2 billion. The increase will be used to address the maintenance backlog and offset lost purchasing power.

Question. Diplomatic Reserve Corps: Former and current State Department officials have proposed a diplomatic reserve corps drawn from the ranks of retired FSOs who possess the expertise and experience required to serve when additional manpower is needed. Last year's NDAA calls for the Department to conduct a study of the feasibility and cost of establishing a diplomatic officers' reserve corps. Can you provide an update, if any, on the status of this study?

Answer. The Department is planning to conduct the Diplomatic Reserve Corps feasibility study required in the FY 2023 National Defense Authorization Act to evaluate the concept, assess costs and legal authorities, and consider implementation options. This initial planning will continue over the coming months, and the FY 2024 budget requests \$11 million in anticipation of an initial pilot phase for at least 50 initial hires.

Question. Cyberspace and Emerging Technologies: While I am pleased to see an increase in funding, albeit marginal, for the new Bureau for Cyberspace and Digital Policy (CDP), in this year's request, I am concerned that our approach to cyber-related assistance remains disjointed, with different authorities attached to different types of funding and none of them fit for purpose. The status quo appears to hamper the CDP Bureau's ability to leverage assistance to foreign counterparts in a manner that delivers on the Bureau's integrated mandate, whether it be cyber incident response assistance or programming to promote internet freedom. Why did the Department not seek a specific, fit for purpose cyber assistance funding line?

Answer. The State Department prioritizes digital and cyber assistance support for allies and partners as an important instrument of U.S. foreign policy. The Bureau of Cyberspace and Digital Policy is building programs to meet the high and growing international demand for cyber and digital capacity building and incident response. The bureau continues to identify methods to streamline and enhance foreign assistance programs, including through a potential dedicated digital and cyber assistance fund. We welcome continued conversations with Congress on how best to design and implement such a mechanism.

Question. In the absence of addressing persistent challenges of delivering assistance in this space, how does the Department intend to ensure that the Cyber Bureau is sufficiently funded and capable of delivering on its ambitious mandate?

Answer. The elevation and integration of cyberspace and digital policy in the State Department allows for a more consolidated, efficient, and effective approach to delivering cyber and digital foreign assistance. In addressing foreign policy priorities in this space, the Bureau for Cyberspace and Digital Policy relies on a number of sources of funding, including the regular budget process and other programs such as the CHIPS ITSI Fund and the Countering PRC Influence Fund. As demands for assistance in these sectors continue to grow, we will work with Congress to ensure these activities are sufficiently resourced.

Question. How do you assess the CDP Bureau's ability to coordinate cyber and digital-related funds across the Department, with USAID and other key interagency partners?

Answer. CDP's integrated mandate and streamlined foreign assistance work are improving coordination and monitoring functions, ensuring that programs are complementary, aligned with U.S. policy, and impactful. As one element of its foreign assistance approach, the Digital Connectivity and Cybersecurity Partnership (DCCP) is a key initiative that coordinates with Posts, regional/functional bureaus, and interagency partners including USAID to identify programmatic gaps and op-

portunities and prioritize proposals. DCCP's working group is co-chaired by the Department and USAID.

Question. Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility: Last year's DEIA hearing identified that Latinos, African-Americans, Native Americans and other racial and ethnic groups only account for roughly 15 percent of the Senior Foreign Service and Senior Executive Service. What is being done to address this finding and strengthen diversity in the Department's leadership pipeline?

Answer. In addition to the Congressionally supported paid internship program, the Department applauded fellowships that target historically underrepresented populations such as the Pickering, Powell, and Rangel programs and the Foreign Affairs Information Technology and Clarke Diplomatic Security fellowships. Our Diplomats in Residence recruit diverse talent. In our senior ranks, we now advertise nearly all opportunities, including most recently Deputy Assistant Secretary positions, and selections to senior positions are done by diverse panels rather than individual decisionmakers.

Question. Please explain how DEIA initiatives would be incorporated into the recruitment and retention of the additional 164 Foreign Service and 351 Civil Service personnel included in the budget request?

Answer. DEIA initiatives continue to be critical to my Modernization Agenda, and DEIA underpins recruitment and retention for both Foreign Service and Civil Service personnel, including for these additional requested positions. We have been intentional in institutionalizing DEIA into all aspects of the Department's workforce processes so they will apply to all current and future personnel. We also created a Retention Unit in the Bureau of Global Talent Management that is working on a strategy to ensure that State prioritizes a work culture that attracts and retains diverse talent.

Question. On March 21, the world marked the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination highlighting the need for continued global actions. Successful implementation of the E.O. could do much to not only address racial discrimination, but also other inequities in our country and abroad. Given the enormity of the tasks that the equity team must undertake to review and/or develop racial and other equity programs and policies for the entire Department on multiple continents (e.g., Department policies, overseas programming, procurement efforts with minority businesses, etc.): Will the equity team be situated in the Secretary's front office, and have the ability to work directly with agency leadership to implement its work?

Answer. I appointed Desiree Cormier Smith as the Special Representative for Racial Equity and Justice and the Department's senior designated official for the Agency Equity Team. The Special Representative and her team are situated in the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor's front office. The Special Representative coordinates closely with the senior official in the Office of Global Women's Issues, the chief diversity and inclusion officer, the senior environmental justice officer, the special envoy for LGBTQI+, and other senior officials leading and shaping the agency's equity strategies across offices and functions.

Question. Are the staffing and resources needed to implement the Racial Equity E.O. reflected in the budget request? If not, how will the staffing and activities of the equity team be funded, and what are the expected costs?

Answer. The special representative for racial equity and justice is the senior designated official for the Department's Agency Equity Team, which is created from existing Department resources and staffing structures. Executive Order 14091 outlines coordination across the Department, which will require dedicated resources to ensure equity initiatives are cohesive and effective, that the Department remains accountable to the public for its equity work, and that its efforts match the intent of the executive order. The Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor (DRL) will work with relevant Department stakeholders to ensure the budget reflects this commitment.

Question. The Department's 2022 Equity Action Plan, stated that the Department will "develop analytic tools for integrating equity into the development and implementation of foreign policy by 2024."³⁷ So far, what analytic tools have been developed and integrated into the foreign policy decision-making process as a result of this equity initiative?

Answer. To integrate equity into the development and implementation of foreign policy by 2024, the Department has created and launched "Equity Across Foreign Affairs" Agency Priority Goal (APG) for FYs 2022-2023, an analytical tool that es-

establishes strategies and performance metrics to gauge APG progress and success. This APG will be renewed for FY 2024–2025. Additionally, together with USAID, the State Department developed and is currently implementing a Joint Strategic Plan for FY 2022–2026 that includes Strategic Objective 3.2: Advance equity, accessibility, and rights for all.

Question. PEPFAR: In the GAO report, (GAO–23–105347, 12/12/2022) it noted that “State Has Taken Actions to Address Coordination Challenges, but Staffing Challenges Persist.” What is the status of efforts to address staffing gaps in the Office of the Global AIDS Coordinator?

Answer. HHS/CDC, USAID, DoD, and Peace Corps helped the Office of the Global Aids Coordinator (S/GAC) address its chronic staffing challenges by providing 28 short-term detailees in the fall of 2022. Surge support from the Department is enabling S/GAC to accelerate hiring of 40 individuals through a variety of hiring mechanisms. In 2023, we are redirecting our focus and developing a long-term strategy that will close the staffing gap and increase staff retention.

Question. The same report on page 20 notes, “As of September 2022, 216 of 308 positions in S/GAC’s HQ office were vacant (70 percent)” and on page 21, “As of August 2022, 25 of the 28 PEPFAR country coordinator positions (89 percent) were filled by an acting coordinator.” Further it states that persistent PEPFAR staffing vacancies have led to heavy workload and retention issues, yet S/GAC has not identified or addressed underlying causes of vacancies, and it does not address long-term human capital gaps program-wide by, for example, developing long-term strategies for acquiring, developing, and retaining staff to achieve program goals. To address this finding, GAO recommended that the coordinator develop a strategic workforce planning process to identify and address the underlying causes for persistent staffing vacancies in S/GAC headquarters and country teams. What do you think are the major impediments to hiring and retention of employees for PEPFAR?

Answer. Hiring and retention of both coordinators and S/GAC staff is a responsibility I take very seriously. Alignment of the necessary subject matter expertise—in public health, medicine, epidemiology, data science, as well as skills in diplomacy, policy, budget, and program management—is critical to provide appropriate oversight of the PEPFAR program both at the field and headquarter levels. Furthermore, insufficient requisite job series and lack of promotion opportunities have been central challenges. Conducting a workforce planning study will further identify those roles impacted by attrition.

Recruitment and retention have improved considerably and with the anticipated strategic workforce planning process, we expect a more positive outcome to these metrics.

Question. What is the status of the development of long-term strategies for acquiring, developing, and retaining staff?

Answer. Talent management and development remains at the forefront of priority business needs for the Office of the Global Aids Coordinator (S/GAC). S/GAC has addressed the challenges in mobilizing a diverse talent pool and expediting the security clearance process by introducing a fully functional EX capability. This capability within S/GAC will drive these critical Talent Acquisition initiatives.

S/GAC is also benefiting from the Department’s broader modernization agenda, which has prioritized improving professional development opportunities for Civil Service employees. Through the appropriate authorities, S/GAC will utilize a broad range of hiring flexibilities to quickly address bureau needs.

Question. Staffing in Africa: A number of the career foreign service officers recently nominated to serve as Ambassador in key posts in Africa such as Mali and Sudan, either have no experience serving in Africa, have never served as an Ambassador, or both. All of these officers are very accomplished diplomats, but the absence of prior Africa or Chief of Mission experience is surprising. To what extent do Foreign Service officers who have served in Africa have the same opportunity for advancement as those who serve in other regions?

Answer. The Department seeks to attract the widest pool of qualified candidates for senior leadership positions, reflecting the diversity and breadth of experience of the foreign affairs community, and reviews the qualifications of proposed candidates, considering the Department’s leadership and management principles and the post-specific requirements identified for each position. Officers who serve in Africa have the same opportunity for advancement globally, including for chief of mission positions, and are evaluated by a service-wide set of core precepts or competencies in which potential must be demonstrated to advance. The conditions and

challenges unique to assignments in Africa often provide officers professional development opportunities and supervisory experience earlier in their careers.

Question. Is there data supporting your response? If so, please share it with the Committee.

Answer. As one example, 10 of the 12 current nominees for chief of mission positions in the Bureau of African Affairs (AF) countries have served at least one AF tour. Last year, 21 of the 24 nominees had prior AF experience. Moreover, nominees for chief of mission positions in other regional bureaus frequently have extensive experience working at AF posts as well.

Question. Are you concerned about the message that selecting Foreign Service Officers who have never served in the region at any point in their career sends a signal to U.S. diplomats who have spent considerable time working at difficult and challenging posts in Africa that their prospects for career advancement are limited?

Answer. Ensuring the selection of the most qualified officers for important leadership positions is essential to the successful conduct of U.S. foreign policy and the leadership of our missions overseas. The Department has a robust process for choosing chiefs of mission to ensure that we identify highly qualified individuals for every one of these positions in the Bureau of African Affairs (AF), particularly emphasizing those candidates with hardship and/or regional experience. The majority of nominees for chiefs of mission in African countries have prior AF experience, including 10 of the 12 nominees currently awaiting confirmation.

Question. What steps will you take to ensure that officers serving in Africa can have confidence that they have the same career advancement opportunities as those who serve in other regions?

Answer. The Department seeks to attract the widest pool of qualified candidates for leadership positions, reflecting the diversity and breadth of experience of the foreign affairs community, and reviews the qualifications of proposed candidates, considering the Department's leadership and management principles and the post-specific requirements identified for each position. Opening leadership opportunities to qualified staff, regardless of previous regional expertise, is an important factor in maintaining morale among the senior ranks of the service. Just as highly qualified leaders from throughout the Department are considered for positions in Africa, statistics demonstrate that those who spend considerable time in Africa are highly competitive for positions worldwide and are promoted more rapidly than those without Africa experience.

Question. Ethiopia: The International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia (ICHREE) report from September 2022 stated that "the denial and obstruction of humanitarian access to Tigray Region by the Federal Government and allied regional State governments was committed for the purpose of depriving the Tigrayan population of objects indispensable for its survival, including food." You indicated in the budget hearing on March 22 that your determination regarding atrocities in Ethiopia addressed denial and obstruction of humanitarian access. How did that conduct factor into your assessments regarding war crimes and crimes against humanity?

Answer. The determination is not intended to be an exhaustive accounting of all acts that constitute atrocities over the course of the conflict. Given the various allegations relating to this armed conflict, we decided to address the atrocities collectively and not make public determinations for each specific instance. Our focus was on the final determination, which was that all of the major parties to the conflict committed atrocities.

Question. What role do you assess that the civilian authorities at the federal level played in such denial and obstruction?

Answer. Our atrocities determination is not meant to "name names," nor be an exhaustive accounting of all crimes by all actors over the course of the conflict. There are several tools at our disposal, including visa sanctions and President Biden's September 2021 executive order, to target individuals, both military and civilian, proven to be involved in atrocities. We stand ready to use these tools if and when conditions warrant.

Question. Did the State Department agree to end the mandate of the International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia in exchange for the Ethiopian Government dropping its efforts to disband ICHREE early?

Answer. The U.S. decision on whether to support renewal of the ICHREE mandate will be based on the human rights situation on the ground. Upon learning that

the Government of Ethiopia was considering tabling a resolution to prematurely end the mandate of ICHREE, the United States and like-minded partners immediately shared with Ethiopian officials that this would not be in their best interest, and that the Commission must be allowed to complete its mandate. We also conveyed our grave concerns over the institutional damage the precedent of early termination could cause to the Human Rights Council.

Question. How do you expect the judicial systems of Ethiopia or Eritrea to hold those responsible for atrocity crimes accountable? Neither country has a track record of delivering justice through the courts.

Answer. We are encouraged by the Government of Ethiopia's efforts to establish a credible, nationwide transitional justice process that meets international standards. We believe that our diplomatic engagement can help support Ethiopians who are committed to a meaningful accountability process. We also believe that durable accountability processes must be driven by Ethiopians—rather than outsiders—regardless of what the country's history with accountability may be. A credible Ethiopian-led process will make it more likely that Eritrea pursues its own accountability measures.

Question. The Ethiopian Ministry of Foreign Affairs tweeted that, according to the U.S. Chargé d'affaires in Addis Ababa, the atrocities determination you announced will not present any barrier to the bilateral relations of Ethiopia and the United States. The MFA also indicated that the Chargé conveyed that the U.S. was ready to support the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission—Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights Joint Investigation and Transitional Justice Policy. What are the legal and policy implications for assistance—including the provision of security assistance—given your determination related to the atrocities carried out by the Ethiopian National Defense Forces?

Answer. An atrocity determination, which acknowledges that atrocities were committed, is independent of the legal requirement to determine whether there is an ongoing pattern of gross violations of human rights. Currently, we have assistance restrictions in place and will re-evaluate based on verifiable evidence. For diplomatic engagement with the Government of Ethiopia regarding the determination, the State Department provided carefully tailored messaging, which U.S. Embassy Addis Ababa meticulously followed.

Question. Is the United States supporting the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission-Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights Joint Investigation and Transitional Justice Policy? If so, in what way?

Answer. A credible transitional justice process that meets international standards is important to securing lasting peace in Ethiopia. We are in regular contact with transitional justice stakeholders in Addis and are considering options to support human rights accountability within the current legal and policy constraints. This may or may not include direct support to the independent Ethiopian Human Rights Commission.

Question. Mali/Sahel: The Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Partnership Program Act of 2022, which I led in the Senate, required the Administration to deliver a strategy specifically for Mali to Congress, but that strategy was never produced. Instead, the Committee received a copy of the Integrated Country Strategy, a publicly available document which was developed before the law was even passed. Considering the French military withdrawal, and the partnership between the Malian junta and Wagner—which has committed egregious human rights abuses while failing to improve the security situation—it might have been useful to have a strategy on hand. I understand that there is now an effort underway to develop a strategy for Mali. When can we expect to see it? Do I have your commitment that going forward, State Department will comply with Congressionally mandated requirements?

Answer. We continue to refine our thinking on the dynamic problems in Mali. A strategic review of policy options is underway in the context of the Administration's Sahel Strategy as well as deliberations for the renewal of the UN peacekeeping mission in Mali, MINUSMA. Mali is also central to our efforts to curb Wagner's expansion in Africa. We will provide an updated Mali strategy as soon as it is completed, and in the meantime will endeavor to explain new provisions that are being considered. We also will provide a general overview of our strategy for the MINUSMA mandate renewal negotiations once finalized.

Question. A September 2020 Inspector General's report identified \$200 million in potentially wasteful spending on Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Partnership programs due to mismanagement and inadequate oversight from staff in the Africa Bu-

reau caused, in part, by staffing shortages. The report found that the State Department has not appropriately prioritized the Africa Bureau's needs. This neglect appears to extend to overseas postings, where our embassies in Niger and the Central African Republic, among others, have lacked key staff for extended periods of time. As of July 2022, more than 20 percent of approved State Department positions in Chad, Niger, Burkina Faso, Mali, and Mauritania were vacant. Our embassy in Niger had as high as a 40 percent vacancy rate and lacked both a political and economic officer for months on end. Have the vacancies that were identified been filled?

Answer. A top priority at the Bureau of African Affairs is to ensure that vacancies at all posts are filled with competent and experienced officers as quickly as possible. The Department is actively filling vacant positions in Chad, Niger, Burkina Faso, Mali, and Mauritania throughout the summer transfer season, further reducing the vacancy rates.

Question. How will the budget proposal help with persistent staffing gaps in the Sahel?

Answer. Staffing gaps at Sahel posts have been substantially reduced in the past year. The Department will continue its efforts to further reduce these gaps through targeted recruitment and existing incentives.

Question. What steps should the State Department take to better incentivize assignments to challenging posts in Africa?

Answer. More than half of our historically difficult to staff (HDS) posts are in Africa. The Department continues to use increased incentives for service in HDS posts around the world, including service needs differential for extended service, along with hardship differentials, and prioritized assignments. Additionally, several initiatives are underway, including development of regional support models. In the last year, the Department also has reformed incentives to better focus bidders' attention on the most difficult to staff posts.

Question. What additional steps do you plan to take this fiscal year to ensure that the Africa Bureau has adequate resources and staff, including a properly skilled, trained, and incentivized workforce equipped to meet the Bureau's needs and objectives?

Answer. As part of its effort to address the staffing challenges in Africa, the Bureau for African Affairs (AF) routinely works with the Bureau of Global Talent Management to fill its entry-level positions. In addition, the FY 2024 request includes \$37 million for AF in operating and Public Diplomacy (PD) resources, including 15 new positions, to increase capacity for regional competition with the PRC and help manage complex embassies. In addition, in the last year, the Department has reformed bidding incentives to better focus bidders' attention on the most difficult to staff posts and continues to explore creative solutions for recruiting and retaining talent in these difficult locations.

Question. Democratic Republic of Congo: Mr. Secretary, I am concerned about escalating tensions in eastern Congo. On February 6, Human Rights Watch reported that, "Rwanda-backed M23 rebels in North Kivu are leaving behind a growing trail of war crimes against civilians." The very next day, the UN Joint Human Rights Office in DRC, reported that M23 executed 171 Congolese civilians in two villages in eastern DRC during just 1 week in November. How are you engaging to deescalate and discourage Rwandans from fighting alongside M23 rebels?

Answer. The Department of State is similarly alarmed about escalating tensions in eastern DRC and has been engaging at high levels on this issue. Secretary Blinken, Deputy Secretary Sherman, and Assistant Secretary for African Affairs Phee have made it clear to President Kagame and Foreign Minister Biruta that Rwandan support to the UN-sanctioned M23 rebel group must stop and Rwanda must withdraw its troops from DRC. We will maintain high-level diplomatic engagement—with a focus on regional mediation efforts—and consider every tool available to end the conflict in eastern DRC.

Question. Do you believe Rwanda is implicated in the atrocities Human Rights Watch and the UN allege the M23 committed?

Answer. The Department of State finds the evidence presented by the UN Group of Experts about Rwanda's support for M23 and the human rights abuses by M23 to be credible. The United States continues to engage with Rwanda to cease its support for M23. We remain deeply concerned by the reports of abuses and violations of human rights and violations of international humanitarian law against the people living in eastern DRC.

Question. Will you or another member of your senior team travel to the region as soon as possible along with counterparts from France and the European Union on a mission to ease tensions?

Answer. Secretary Blinken traveled to Rwanda and DRC in August 2022, where he met with Presidents Kagame and Tshisekedi. He continues to engage them, their foreign ministers, and other regional leaders on a regular basis. Ambassador Robert Wood, the United States' Alternate Representative to the UN for Special Political Affairs, accompanied the UN Security Council high-level visit to DRC in March. Assistant Secretary Phee also met with President Kagame and other leaders in Addis Ababa in February. The Department of State will maintain high-level engagement to resolve the conflict.

Question. What is the status of the review of our Rwanda policy requested by SFRC staff?

Answer. The Bureau of African Affairs continues to review U.S. policy towards Rwanda and would be glad to brief your office when the review is complete.

Question. South Sudan: Concerns about mismanagement at Embassy Juba prompted visits by the Inspectors General for both State and USAID late last year. The Director General of the Foreign Service also visited. What prompted these visits?

Answer. A regular OIG inspection of Embassy Juba was overdue and was scheduled as part of the Inspector General's inspection cycle. It focused on State-only personnel and operations. The director general visited Post at the Ambassador's and the Bureau for African Affairs' request during a multi-country visit to the African continent.



VIA ELECTRONIC TRANSMISSION

May 16, 2023

The Honorable Robert Menendez
Chairman
Committee on Foreign Relations
United States Senate

Dear Senator Menendez:

We are writing in response to a question for the record you submitted to the Department of State (Department) following the March 22, 2023, testimony of Secretary of State Blinken before your committee. Given our purview on the matter and our independence, we are responding directly rather than through the Department.

You asked the following regarding South Sudan:

Concerns about mismanagement at Embassy Juba prompted visits by the Inspectors General for both State and USAID late last year. The Director General of the Foreign Service also visited. What prompted these visits?

In response to the portion of the question regarding our visit to Embassy Juba, State OIG visited Embassy Juba for multiple reasons. The Department of State, Office of Inspector General (OIG) uses a risk-based approach to prioritize our inspections of overseas posts. This approach incorporates factors that provide information on major functions at posts, including physical and information security, consular operations, and management platforms. At the time we selected Embassy Juba for inspection, OIG's risk-based approach assessed the embassy as "medium-high" risk. In determining which posts to inspect, we consider the time that has elapsed since the most recent inspection. In the case of Embassy Juba, it was last inspected in FY 2013. We also consider whether any complaints or concerns have been communicated to us through our hotline or other channels. Finally, although it is ultimately OIG's independent decision concerning which posts to inspect, we routinely consult with stakeholders in the Department and Congress when preparing our annual work plan.

We recently issued the Unclassified (with redactions) and Sensitive But Unclassified inspection reports of Embassy Juba, South Sudan. The Classified inspection report of Embassy Juba is in draft and will be issued in the next several months.

If you have additional questions, please do not hesitate to contact me or State OIG's Director of Congressional and Public Affairs, Ryan Holden, at ryan.d.holden@stateoig.gov or (571) 349-9259.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Diana R. Shaw". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line extending from the end.

Diana R. Shaw
Deputy Inspector General performing the duties of the Inspector General
U.S. Department of State

Question. Do you commit to addressing any personnel and/or management concerns at Embassy Juba as soon as possible?

Answer. Yes. Embassy leadership has consistently made clear that it prioritizes putting people first, including by addressing any issues that could impact U.S. and Locally Employed staff wellbeing and morale, and actively promoting mission-wide collaboration and inclusion.

Question. IMET: I was pleased to see the Administration request \$1 million in International Military and Education Training (IMET) for Greece, but this is only 56 percent of what Congress authorized as part of my bipartisan U.S.-Greece Defense and Interparliamentary Act. And while I was also pleased by the request for \$500,000 in IMET for Cyprus, I think that could be boosted as well. However, now that the State Department has certified that Cyprus has met the necessary conditions for lifting defense trade restrictions for FY 2023, in accordance with my bipartisan Eastern Mediterranean Security and Energy Partnership Act, what needs to happen for the Administration to request Foreign Military Financing (FMF) appropriations for Cyprus to help defend itself amid Turkey's ongoing occupation?

Answer. We work to ensure IMET meets our partners' needs within the bounds of our budgetary priorities and the partners' capacity to absorb funding. Cyprus cannot receive FMF until they are eligible for Foreign Military Sales, which would require a Presidential Determination under the Arms Export Control Act. Our security relationship with Cyprus has improved gradually since 2018. We could consider this Determination in the future. Cyprus can presently purchase Direct Commercial Sales (DCS) commodities, which are appropriate for Cyprus' current defense needs and its budget.

Question. The governments of Chad, Rwanda, Uganda, and eSwatini are all reportedly responsible for or complicit recent violations and abuses of human rights and violations of international humanitarian law. In Chad, for instance, the Chadian military junta is responsible for the massacre of more than 100 pro-democracy protesters in October 2022 and the arbitrary arrest and disappearance of hundreds more. The Rwandan military is once again supporting and fighting alongside UN-sanctioned M23 rebels in eastern DRC. The eSwatini Government massacred dozens of pro-democracy protesters in 2021 and assassinated one of the country's most prominent human rights activists in January 2023. Ugandan security forces, meanwhile, continue to use torture and forced disappearance with impunity to target opposition activists and those critical of the Museveni government. The FY 2024 budget request allocates \$800,000 in International Military Education and Training (IMET) to Chad, \$200,000 in IMET to Eswatini, \$550,000 in IMET to Rwanda, and \$700,000 in IMET to Uganda. Do you agree that there is credible evidence implicating the Chadian military junta in the deaths and torture of civilian protesters in October 2022 and the Rwandan military in violations and abuses committed by M23 in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo?

Answer. The United States is concerned by the violence against civilian protesters in Chad and human rights abuses by armed groups in the DRC. We continue to press for full investigation of these incidents, including through an international inquiry into October 20 violence in Chad, leading to accountability for those responsible. We urge Eswatini officials to address human rights issues and closely monitor the ongoing investigation into the January 2023 murder of Thulani Maseko, pressing for full accountability for those responsible. The United States has repeatedly publicly and privately called on Rwanda and all actors in the region to cease support to M23 or other armed groups. In addition, the United States has not obligated any security assistance programming for the Rwandan military, including IMET, since summer 2022.

Question. What do we hope to accomplish with such assistance given the long track record of abuses and impunity?

Answer. IMET funds enable professional military education and building relationships with future military leaders that have a better appreciation for human rights, and civilian control of the military. More professional security forces that are respectful of human rights is important to strengthening democracy and governance in Africa. Continued engagement with our security partners is critical to regional security, and for sustaining democratic gains in the region. More professional military leaders with significant influence from the United States also allow for an ongoing dialogue and frank conversations about shared goals and objectives at high levels of government that are otherwise closed to international engagement and cooperation.

Question. How are we assessing impact of our assistance?

Answer. State has funded a monitoring and evaluation team to assess the impact of the IMET program. One objective of the IMET program is to enhance our bilateral military-to-military relationships resulting from the one-to-one relationships and experience forged during various U.S. Government-funded military courses in the United States. Through the accession of IMET alumni to senior-level leadership positions, the U.S. Government may find increasing number of individuals with experience and knowledge of U.S. military doctrine and technical skills in the host nation government. Therefore, building these key relationships assists in maintaining U.S. Government access and influence.

Question. Migration/Refugee Challenges in the Americas: I know that the Administration developed a Root Causes Strategy and signed the Los Angeles Declaration on Migration with partner countries to address the migration and refugee challenges in the Americas. I have been closely following these efforts. While we may have differences in our approaches, the fundamental problem here seems to be that the Administration is frankly not dedicating enough resources to implement these efforts. We have dedicated more resources to manage the Syrian and Ukraine migration and refugee crises, than we have in our own hemisphere to address the migration and refugee crises with the most immediate impact on our country. Secretary Blinken, can you help me understand this discrepancy?

Answer. The Administration has continually sought to increase the level of funding to address migration and refugee challenges in the Americas and support the successful implementation of the Root Causes Strategy, the Collaborative Migration Management Strategy, and the Los Angeles Declaration. From FY 2020–2022, U.S. humanitarian assistance in the Americas increased from more than \$911 million to nearly \$1.15 billion; moreover, USG commitment to address root causes has led to an increase in funding from nearly \$92 million in FY 2021 to nearly \$274 million in the FY 2024 President’s request (283 percent).

Question. Do you believe the Administration’s current budget is sufficient to address the migration and refugee challenges in the Americas.

Answer. Funding constraints for migration and refugee needs remain a challenge globally, however, our current budget request prioritizes addressing these needs and supports the 2022 Los Angeles Declaration on Migration and Protection. The Administration has committed to long-term, multifaceted solutions that address the root causes of migration and encourage collaborative migration management throughout the hemisphere. Progress requires sustained political commitment and cooperation across a range of stakeholders, combined with private sector and foreign assistance investments.

Question. Mexico: Secretary Blinken, the United States relationship with Mexico has more impact on the daily lives of our fellow citizens than nearly any other in the world. For this reason, in the last several years, I have been raising the alarm on how President López Obrador’s actions are making the U.S.-Mexico partnership increasingly difficult. From his repeated efforts to undermine democracy, including by gutting Mexico’s independent electoral authority, to his unwillingness to confront cartels and acknowledge his country’s role in producing the illicit fentanyl poisoning our citizens, President López Obrador is setting the clock back on U.S.-Mexico relations. How have you personally engaged on issues of democracy and combatting gangs and fentanyl trafficking with the López Obrador government?

Answer. I share your commitment to democratic principles, human rights, and rule of law—free of political influence—in Mexico. I raise these issues regularly with officials at the most senior levels of Mexico’s government in both public and private conversations. The Department supports a well-resourced, independent judiciary and electoral institution. U.S. foreign assistance strengthens democratic institutions, civil society, and the rule of law, and combats the production and trafficking of fentanyl.

Question. How is the Administration dedicating resources to address bipartisan concerns on these issues?

Answer. Addressing the production and trafficking of fentanyl is a top priority. The State Department has sponsored U.S.-Mexico forensic exchanges on synthetic drug synthesis, held fentanyl awareness trainings for Mexican law enforcement, and donated detection canines and protective equipment to facilitate fentanyl interdiction. The Department also promotes inclusive approaches to open government principles for more transparent, participatory, and accountable governance through policy and programming.

Question. The Administration takes the position that India is and will continue to be an important strategic partner in the Indo-Pacific and a key member of the Quad, and yet we have seen a number of concerning trends emerging in Indian democracy, as well as abroad—not least is their willingness to continue to purchase Russian oil and arms. With that in mind, what steps is the Administration taking to support democracy and human rights in India?

Answer. I regularly engage with Indian Government officials on human rights, including freedom of religion or belief, and encourage India to uphold its human rights commitments. Through the U.S.-India Global Issues Forum and the Human Rights Report we communicate our concerns about censorship, internet freedom, the detention of human rights activists, and other human rights issues. The Administration also meets with civil society representatives both in the United States and India to hear their perspectives regarding human rights conditions on the ground.

Question. Lebanon: In December, Senator Risch and I wrote a letter to Secretary of the Treasury Janet Yellen and yourself, calling for the use of sanctions against Lebanon's financial and political elite for obstructing the election of a president and implementation of needed financial reforms. Since then, gridlock and suffering in Lebanon has only gotten worse. Why has the Administration yet to announce any additional sanctions against corrupt officials in Lebanon?

Answer. I share your concerns about endemic corruption in Lebanon, officials' reluctance to implement reforms, and stalled presidential elections. We continue to press Lebanese officials at all levels on these priorities. In addition to diplomatic engagement, sanctions can be a useful tool to encourage progress and a warning to those undermining the rule of law. Our previous designations clearly demonstrate our commitment to combatting corruption, and we continue to work with the Department of the Treasury to identify impactful targets.

Question. Does the Administration require new authorities in order to sanction such individuals?

Answer. We are committed to combatting corruption and encouraging reform. I am confident that our existing tools, including sanctions authorities such as Executive Order 13441, are sufficient to promote accountability for corrupt Lebanese officials who contributed to undermining the rule of law and democratic institutions and processes in Lebanon. To this end, I continue to work closely with my colleagues at the Department of the Treasury to use all available tools, as demonstrated by several previous designations.

Question. Syria: I was heartened to see the Administration's recent designation of individuals under authorities pursuant to the Caesar Syrian Civilian Protection Act of 2019. Unfortunately, there is no shortage of candidates for Caesar sanctions. When can we expect further designations pursuant to Caesar authorities?

Answer. The Administration is fully committed to upholding its legal obligations under the Caesar Act and appreciates having this important tool at our disposal to enforce accountability on the Syrian regime. Over the past year, the Department of State worked closely with the Department of the Treasury and other interagency partners to identify suitable targets, and gather sufficient evidence, that met the legal requirements for designations under the Caesar Act and other sanctions authorities. The Department will continue to work actively with Treasury to identify targets for potential future sanctions, including under the Caesar Act.

Question. The Administration is required under the 2023 NDAA to provide a report and strategy on its response to Captagon trafficking. Will you commit to providing that report before its due date?

Answer. The Department is actively working with interagency colleagues to draft an interagency strategy on disrupting and dismantling the captagon trade, as required under the 2023 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA). We look forward to submitting the final report by the 180-day deadline specified in the NDAA.

Question. The State Department has rightfully worked to seek accountability for Russian war crimes in Ukraine. It is less clear what the United States is doing to hold the Assad regime accountable for the crimes it has perpetrated against its own people. Specifically, what is the State Department, along with other U.S. Government agencies and in conjunction with other nations, international organizations, and NGOs, doing to advance justice and accountability in Syria?

Answer. Our commitment to hold the Assad regime to account for its atrocities in Syria is unwavering. The Department supports UN accountability mechanisms, including the International, Impartial, and Independent Mechanism and the Commission of Inquiry; leads efforts in the UN to hold the regime to account, including

in the UNGA Third Committee and at the UN Human Rights Council; and publicly designated regime officials involved in human rights violations under section 7031(c) of the Department of State and Foreign Operations Appropriations Act.

Question. Iraq: I have welcomed the Administration's announcement of the end of combat operations in Iraq and its commitment to transitioning the U.S.-Iraq relationship to one led by traditional bilateral diplomacy. However, I am very concerned that the Administration's request of \$75 million in FMF for Iraq is too low to address the threats facing Iraq, even within the context of our evolving relationship. Please explain the process by which the Administration came to this amount, especially following reductions in previous year's requests.

Answer. The Administration's FY 2024 request reflects the Department's careful assessment of all available prior-year FMF funding for Iraq. This amount includes \$250 million per year directed by Congress over multiple years and appropriated above request levels. When prior year funds are coupled with the FY 2024 request of \$75 million, we believe there will be sufficient FMF to address the threats facing Iraq and support ongoing maintenance, sustainment, training, and equipment needs for current and planned programs supporting the Iraqi Security Forces.

Question. Please also provide a detailed assessment of what these cuts mean for the Administration's ability to continue to build out the strategic foundation of the U.S.-Iraq relationship.

Answer. We do not anticipate an impact on the strategic foundation of the U.S.-Iraq relationship due to the FY 2024 request of \$75 million in Foreign Military Financing. Our partnership with Iraq stretches far beyond our security assistance and is underpinned by a shared commitment to the full range of bilateral issues enumerated in the Strategic Framework Agreement.

Question. Can you outline the mutual military support we are seeing between Iran and Russia as a result of Iran's provision of lethal UAVs for Russia's use against Ukraine?

Answer. Iran has become Russia's top military backer. Since August, Iran has transferred several hundred UAVs to Russia. In November, Iran shipped artillery and tank rounds to Russia for use in Ukraine. In return, Russia has been offering Iran unprecedented defense cooperation, including on missiles, electronics, and air defense.

We continue to counter, expose, and disrupt these activities, including through sanctions designations and export controls, and we are prepared to do more.

Question. What further support can we expect both countries to provide in the coming weeks and months?

Answer. Iran's unmanned aerial vehicle shipments are likely to continue, and in turn is seeking to purchase military equipment from Russia, including Su-35 fighter jets, attack helicopters, radars, and YAK-130 combat trainer aircraft. This partnership poses a threat not just to Ukraine, but to Iran's neighbors in the region as well. We have shared this information with partners in the Middle East and around the world, and we will continue to use the tools at our disposal to expose and disrupt these activities.

Question. What more could the United States, working with our allies, do to combat Iran's arming of Russia and the Russian support of Iran's advanced capabilities in areas like cyber and elsewhere?

Answer. The Departments of Treasury, Commerce, and State have imposed sanctions on 41 entities or individuals involved in Iran's unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) industry since 2021, and we will continue to pursue sanctions and export controls to counter Iranian UAV transfers to Russia. Existing sanctions have deterred or disrupted many billions of dollars' worth of Russian arms sales and we continue to monitor for other potentially sanctionable activities.

Question. How is the Administration ensuring that the Human Rights Council-created Fact Finding Mission on Iran is receiving adequate support to carry out its ongoing investigation into violations of the human rights of protesters?

Answer. We are closely following the work of the independent fact-finding mission created by the Human Rights Council. The fact-finding mission was fully funded from the UN budget and is building its staff. We have met with the commissioners responsible for the fact-finding mission to ensure they have adequate support. We believe the Human Rights Council is an appropriate venue to discuss the regime's conduct and amplify the voices of the Iranian people, and we look forward to joining our partners in that effort.

Question. Despite intermittent U.S. sanctions on Iranian oil exports, the regime is exporting more oil today than at any time since 2018 when the sanctions were reimposed. Why hasn't the State Department worked with interagency partners to seize and consign illicit Iranian oil shipments?

Answer. We have continued to enforce our sanctions against Iran, including targeting of PRC-based entities engaged in sanctions evasion. For example, on March 9 we designated a "shadow banking" network of 39 entities across multiple jurisdictions, including the PRC, for facilitating transactions and shipment of Iranian petrochemicals and petroleum products worth tens of billions of dollars annually for the Iranian regime.

Question. What is your strategy to change China's calculus on importing Iranian oil?

Answer. We regularly engage with the PRC and strongly discourage them from taking steps vis-à-vis Iran that contravene U.S. sanctions. We also remain concerned about Iran's sanctions evasion activity, including activity involving the PRC, and will not hesitate to take actions against sanctions evaders. For example, on March 9 we designated a "shadow banking" network of 39 entities, including PRC-backed entities, for facilitating transactions and shipment of Iranian petrochemicals and petroleum.

Question. Is the Administration considering Global Magnitsky sanctions against senior Iranian leadership?

Answer. To mark International Human Rights Day on December 9, 2022, the Administration used the Global Magnitsky authority for the first time against Iranian individuals involved in serious human rights abuses in connection with violent protests following the death of Mahsa Amini while in custody. We will continue to find ways, including sanctions, to impose costs on Iranian individuals and entities who brutally repress the Iranian people.

Question. What additional non-sanction steps is the State Department taking to support those in Iran seeking their basic human rights and freedoms? Please provide a detailed explanation of our current programmatic efforts to target broadcasting to Iranians.

Answer. The State Department continues to partner with outside organizations to support civil society and human rights defenders in Iran and to promote the free flow of information to the Iranian people. In the United Nations and other multilateral fora, we and partners are holding Iran accountable for its human rights abuses. We issued General License D-2, expanding internet-based services for Iranians. We continue to support efforts to deliver information to the Iranian people through the U.S. Agency for Global Media's Persian language television, radio, and social media channels.

Question. Israel: The United States regularly expresses opposition to resolutions and mechanisms reflecting anti-Israel bias at the UN. Please share what the State Department and our missions to the UN in New York and Geneva are doing to bring about the end of the one-sided and harmful Commission of Inquiry on Israel, which has an open-ended mandate, and the Human Rights Council's biased agenda item 7.

Answer. We continue building a coalition of partners to end this open-ended and vaguely defined Commission of Inquiry (COI). During the March session of the Human Rights Council, Ambassador Taylor delivered a statement outlining U.S. objections to the COI. During the June 2022 session, the United States also led a joint statement signed by a cross-regional group of over 20 countries condemning the COI's mandate. We continue to raise our concerns about bias against Israel in the UN system with the president of the UN Human Rights Committee and high commissioner, as well as the secretary-general's point person to combat antisemitism in the UN system, High Representative for the UN Alliance of Civilizations Miguel Moratinos.

Question. Jordan: I am supportive of the Administration's new assistance MOU with Jordan and the conditionality included in it to incentivize important reforms to the country's water and civil service sectors. Will the Administration still have the leverage needed to push these reforms if Congress appropriates more than what is requested?

Answer. We are committed to working with Jordan to support its reform agenda, including in the water and public sectors, a commitment enshrined in the memorandum of understanding for strategic partnership. These mutually established reforms are critical for Jordan's economic and political stability and we hope and ex-

pect that Jordan will carry them out. While we are evaluating options to incentivize these reforms in light of the higher appropriation level, I request Congress provide us with the additional flexibilities requested in the President's FY 2024 budget so that we can fully implement the memorandum of understanding.

Question. Abraham Accords/Negev Forum: How can the State Department promote U.S. private sector engagement and the role of civil society within the Negev Forum?

Answer. We are focused on expanding and deepening the Abraham Accords and normalization agreements. These efforts include exploring potential partnerships between the Negev Forum Working Groups and the private sector to develop and implement projects, as well as consulting with a range of non-governmental stakeholders, including civil society organizations. We look forward to continuing to work with our Negev Forum partners to build on these efforts.

Question. What programs or mechanisms within the State Department are most effective for fostering and advancing Israeli-Arab engagement and greater regional cooperation across the Middle East and North Africa?

Answer. We are using all our available tools to build the connections between regional partners that are essential to the region's prosperity, peace, security, and stability. State and U.S. Agency and International Development exchange programs, including the Nita M. Lowey Middle East Partnership for Peace Act, bolster critical people-to-people breakthroughs. New formats for engagement include the Negev Forum and I2U2 (Israel, India, United States, UAE), which brings together India, Israel, the UAE, and the United States to collaborate on shared challenges, from clean energy to food security, and to solidify connections with the private sectors.

Question. Are there existing governmental tools that could be better utilized?

Answer. We are continuously exploring opportunities to leverage new and existing programs to advance Arab-Israeli relations and regional cooperation. The Department consults with the interagency, including the Department of Defense, Development Finance Corporation, U.S. Trade and Development Agency, U.S. Agency for International Development, and others, to help identify and develop these opportunities.

Question. MENA Opportunity Fund: The budget proposal includes \$90 million for a new Middle East and North Africa Opportunity Fund and lists a variety of countries and priorities in how the funds may be deployed, including Yemen, Libya, and Tunisia, as well as to support regional integration efforts. The amount of money allocated for this fund is comparatively small, while the scale of the policy challenges listed are quite significant. At the same time, I'd note the budget request includes modest cuts to other programming across the region. Since this is a new fund, I'm interested to hear exactly what the Administration intends to do with this fund, how it will prioritize its use, and how it differs from our ongoing bilateral economic support programs? I also want to better understand how the Administration intends to consult Congress in a meaningful way on its intended use and programming of the new fund.

Answer. The fund would be a rapid mechanism to address unforeseen opportunities or challenges; it is not intended to fill bilateral programmatic gaps but rather enable us to better address emerging, concrete changes or opportunities through expeditious interventions covering specific geopolitical, economic, and environmental areas. Funds will be scrutinized to ensure they address gaps unmet with other bilateral, regional, or global resources and directly support explicit foreign policy goals; funds will be subject to standard congressional notification processes.

Question. Central Asia: Central Asian nations continue to have an abysmal human rights record and constrained by their geography next to China and Russia, they generally do not vote with us in the UN. However, last year, several of Central Asia's leaders exhibited modest, yet remarkable exercises of sovereignty. For example, both Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan both made statements refusing to recognize Russia's annexation of parts of Ukraine. While this Administration seeks increased partnership and cooperation with Central Asian governments, how you will also advance progress on human rights and political reform in the region?

Answer. As we strengthen our partnerships with Central Asian countries, we increase space to discuss human rights and other sensitive issues. We have engaged Central Asian leaders with unprecedented frequency over the past year and raise human rights concerns and political reforms in every interaction. We regularly champion press freedom in all five countries, and our foreign assistance supports civil society and media organizations across the region. As a result of this long-

standing advocacy, we have seen incremental, encouraging, and important progress, including the International Labor Organization's finding in 2022 that Uzbekistan's cotton industry is free of systemic forced labor and child labor.

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

Question. GLOBAL HEALTH AND FOREIGN ASSISTANCE—Global Health Security: A key lesson from the largest, most successful U.S. global health program in history—the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR)—is the need to ensure greater coordination of effort, transparency, and accountability among the agencies implementing programs on the ground. A high-level, impartial coordinator at the Department, which is not an implementer, can achieve these goals far more effectively than the implementing agencies themselves. Notably, the budget does not request program funds for the Coordinator for Global Health Security and Diplomacy, who will be housed in the Department's proposed Bureau for Global Health Security. With no new program funds for pandemic preparedness in the bureau, what is its purpose?

Answer. The new Bureau for Global Health Security will be led by an Ambassador-at-Large for Global Health Security and Diplomacy, who will be dual-hatted as the Global AIDS Coordinator. The bureau will bring together existing health functions from across the Department, strengthening the U.S. ability to advance global health priorities through diplomacy and allowing for increased internal and interagency coordination. The new Bureau would continue to use foreign assistance resources under PEPFAR to advance the HIV/AIDS mission and manage other existing programming that addresses other infectious diseases and broader global health security issues. The bureau will build on the strengths of the Department in leading in foreign policy and diplomacy, which extends beyond foreign assistance.

Question. What will the Coordinator, and the bureau that he runs, be coordinating?

Answer. The Global AIDS Coordinator and Ambassador-at-Large for Global Health Security and Diplomacy would continue to oversee the work of PEPFAR programs implemented by interagency partners including USAID, Department of Health and Human Services, Department of Defense, and the Peace Corps through annual country operational plans, interagency workplans, and quarterly reports submitted by operational units, as well as perform the functions outlined under section 5562 of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2023, subject to Senate advice and consent.

Question. Moreover, with no program funds to coordinate, how will the Coordinator for Global Health security and Diplomacy be empowered to ensure greater coordination of effort, transparency, and accountability among the implementing agencies, i.e., USAID and CDC, who all too often conflict with one another?

Answer. The Ambassador-at-Large for Global Health Security and Diplomacy would serve as a strong voice in U.S. interagency discussions and multilateral fora, representing the State Department and supported by staff with vast global health security expertise, to guide the Department's programming in accordance with U.S. and global health security interests. They would work closely with U.S. chiefs of missions on implementation of the Department's foreign assistance programming related to global health security.

Question. While requesting no program funds for the Coordinator for Global Health Security and Diplomacy to coordinate, the Administration has decided to "dual-hat" Ambassador Nkengasong, such that he serves concurrently as the Coordinator for Global Health Security and Diplomacy and PEPFAR. How will you ensure the PEPFAR resources managed by Ambassador Nkengasong and the bureau are not diverted for other purposes, thereby undermining one of the most effective U.S. foreign assistance programs in history?

Answer. PEPFAR will continue to focus only on work to bring the HIV/AIDS pandemic to an end. I am committed to this mandate and will ensure PEPFAR's resources are utilized consistent with the authorities and appropriations for PEPFAR programs, so that the U.S. Government can sustain PEPFAR's impact and end HIV/AIDS by 2030.

Question. Of the \$1.245 billion requested for Global Health Security, \$745 million is for the U.S. Agency for International Development and \$500 million is for the newly established Pandemic Fund, housed at the World Bank. The Global Health

Security and Pandemic Prevention, Preparedness, and Response Act, enacted as part of the FY 2022 National Defense Authorization Act, caps U.S. contributions to the Pandemic Fund at 33 percent. What is the status of other donor contributions to the Pandemic Fund?

Answer. The recently enacted legislation regarding the Pandemic Fund provides a strong signal of U.S. commitment to global health security. The Pandemic Fund currently has nearly \$600 million in available resources with \$1.6 billion in total pledges from 26 donors. All donors must sign their contribution agreements by May, when the Board resets for a 2-year term. We are available to brief you or your team with more information at that point.

Question. Is the \$500 million U.S. contribution proposed in the budget request realistic or aspirational?

Answer. Strong and early commitments from the United States are critical to catalyzing significant investments from partners, as evidenced by the initial U.S. pledge of \$450 million to support the Pandemic Fund that helped spur a total of \$1.6 billion in pledges from global donors within 1 year. While the Pandemic Fund needs additional and sustainable financing to be successful, we believe that the proposed \$500 million contribution from the United States is realistic to meet identified demand while spurring additional commitments from others.

Question. The newly established Coordinator for Global Health Security is meant to serve as the U.S. representative to the Pandemic Fund. How will the Coordinator ensure that the Fund focuses on prevention, preparedness, and building the capacity to respond, rather prioritizing response after an outbreak already has occurred?

Answer. A focus on preparedness and prevention is a foundational principle of the Pandemic Fund and has been codified in several Governing Board-approved documents, including the Results Framework, Governance Framework, and Operations Manual. The new Ambassador-at-Large position and the new Bureau will play a key role in driving attention and focus toward continued prioritization of this critical area of work.

Question. I have introduced a resolution that would deny funds for the implementation of an international pandemics treaty, accord, or other instrument that would be legally binding upon the United States absent Senate advice and consent. Will you commit to sending any pandemics treaty, accord, or other instrument that would be legally binding upon the United States to the Senate for advice and consent?

Answer. To protect the national security of the United States, the Biden administration has prioritized improving international global health security to prevent, detect, and respond to potential health emergencies at their source. The pandemic accord negotiation team has, and will continue to, consult with Congress regularly and transparently as the negotiations to develop a pandemic accord progress.

Question. Food Aid: The budget request “reflects the importance of in-kind agricultural commodities to humanitarian response, but also acknowledges the opportunity to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of U.S. food assistance programs through the reauthorization of the Food for Peace Act.” What reforms are you seeking to make U.S. food aid more efficient and effective? Please be specific.

Answer. To decrease barriers to entry for new and local organizations, while maintaining rigorous oversight of taxpayer dollars, USAID will improve the effectiveness and efficiency of food assistance by providing partners with more choice when designing non-emergency programs. This will address the root causes of chronic hunger in vulnerable communities. USAID is also simplifying complex accounting requirements, consistent with standards for other USAID funding accounts, to reduce administrative burden on USAID and partner staff.

Question. STATE DEPARTMENT MANAGEMENT AND PUBLIC DIPLOMACY—State Department Management: Please provide a full list of any State Department-owned or -leased facilities abroad—embassies and consulates—that were built by Chinese companies or owned Chinese citizens.

Answer. All Department facilities meet all safety and security standards required by law and the Department’s internal policies and regulations, which do not apply on the basis of the national origin or affiliation of the companies involved in the construction of them. While the Department’s real property data collection does not include builder information, the Department’s safety and security analyses for newly acquired facilities are carried out on an individualized basis for each such facility against the backdrop of the specific threat environment in which they exist.

In China, the Department has leased the Consulate General in Shanghai since 1991 and acquired the Consulate General in Shenyang in 1984, both of which are Chinese-built facilities. Chinese companies also built the unclassified facilities at the Consulate in Guangzhou and the new office annex on the Beijing Embassy Compound. Additionally, the Department leases consular facilities in Chinese-built commercial office buildings in Shanghai, Shenyang, and Wuhan. Chinese companies built these commercial office buildings and U.S. companies carried out the lease fit-outs on behalf of the Department.

Question. I have been surprised at the number of embassies and consulates that are closed on Friday afternoons (or the equivalent, depending on the country), even when congressional representatives are visiting posts. Do United States embassies and consulates overseas have standard business hours? If so, what are they? If not, please provide business hours for each embassy and consulate.

Answer. In accordance with long-standing policy, operating hours of embassies and consulates conform with local laws, customs, and conditions. In locations where it is customary for businesses and public offices to close on Friday afternoon, business hours are adjusted on other days to ensure a 40-hour work week. Formal business hours do not limit posts' ability to provide necessary support for all official visits. Posts routinely arrange official events outside of business hours to advance U.S. Government priorities as needed.

Question. Do State Department officers at posts abroad receive time off for U.S. federal holidays?

Answer. Yes, State Department foreign and civil service employees assigned overseas are entitled to paid holiday time off on or close to designated federal holidays.

Question. Do State Department officers at posts abroad receive time off for local holidays?

Answer. Yes, State Department foreign and civil service employees assigned overseas are entitled to paid holiday time off on certain, designated local holidays.

Question. How many days off, on average, does an officer abroad receive between federal and local holidays?

Answer. State Department regulations set a total cap of 21 paid holidays overseas: 11 federal holidays and up to 10 local holidays.

Question. The Office of the Inspector General found that during the pandemic, the Department encouraged maximum telework for both domestic and overseas staff. COVID-19 cases have drastically declined in the United States and around the world. The Biden administration declared its intent to end the national emergency and public health emergency declarations related to the COVID-19 pandemic on May 11, 2023. How can employees who regularly handle classified information consistently work from home?

Answer. When employees handle classified information, they work on-site. In extremely limited exceptional situations, employees may be granted a secure communication kit to enable access to classified information from approved alternate work locations. This capability assists with responding to emergencies and conducting urgent business around the clock.

Question. When the public health emergency declaration is over, will you advocate for the full return to work for all State Department employees? Please explain in detail your justification.

Answer. From the Department's inception, we have worked across the globe—at all hours and in dispersed locations. Throughout the pandemic we used a variety of work arrangements to assist U.S. citizens and address global emergencies. Since spring 2022, all overseas U.S. direct hires and most domestic employees have routinely worked on-site. We will continue innovating and leveraging technology to increase our operational efficiency and agility to achieve the Department's objectives in the face of 21st century challenges.

Question. Consular Affairs: What is the ideal time for the State Department to process the average visa and what is the current average time?

Answer. For a visitor visa, the global median interview appointment wait time is less than 2 months, half what it was in June 2022. Appointment wait times for all other visa categories, including for visitor visa renewals, are lower. We are focused on reducing wait times for first-time visitor visa applicants in historically high-demand areas, where pandemic-related closures resulted in pent-up demand and longer wait times. Wait times for students and temporary worker visas, are at or below pre-pandemic levels.

Question. What accounts for this discrepancy?

Answer. The long interview appointment wait times for first-time B1/B2 visitor visas in some countries are the result of pent-up visa demand outpacing consular staffing levels when pandemic-related travel restrictions ended. Nonimmigrant visa (NIV) interview wait times are coming down faster than projected due to policy changes, innovations, and staffing surge efforts in target locations. The Department is working to assign as many adjudicators as possible overseas, with the aim of reaching global pre-pandemic staffing by the end of this year.

Question. What steps is the State Department taking to speed up the visa approval process and are there viable alternatives to in-person interviews?

Answer. The State Department is pursuing multiple strategies to streamline visa processing and dedicate more resources to reducing wait times consistent with national security. This includes surging staff overseas, working with DHS to pursue expanded interview waiver authorities for additional categories of low-risk visa applicants, and expanding the development and use of technological solutions to remotely adjudicate applications that do not require interviews. The Department will soon pilot domestic revalidation of certain petition-based nonimmigrant visas.

Question. Due to the wide variation in wait times for visa appointments, is the State Department focusing on consulates with longer than average wait times? If so, what is the Department doing to support consulates with a longer than average wait time?

Answer. In FY 2022, the Department exceeded pre-pandemic levels of non-immigrant visa (NIV) issuances in categories critical to economic and bilateral interests, including for seasonal workers, students, and crewmembers. In the first quarter of 2023, the Department surged resources to locations with high wait times for first-time B1/B2 visitor visa applicants, such as India and Mexico. Consular officers in some locations are remotely adjudicating tens of thousands of interview waiver visas each week. Visa renewal wait times, crucial to the economy, are low.

Question. Do you have the funding and other resources necessary to reduce wait times for appointments? If not, what do you need in order to reduce the backlog?

Answer. Since early 2022, the Department reduced gaps in consular staffing overseas caused by the drop in fee revenue due to the pandemic's near-shutdown of international travel. With the resurgence of travel, the Bureau of Consular Affairs' financial situation has improved. The Department is striving to ensure that as many adjudicators as possible are assigned to overseas positions, to reach worldwide pre-pandemic staffing by the end of this year. Maintaining expanded spending authorities and additional fee flexibilities would help allow for continued innovation and additional hiring.

Question. When will the State Department return to pre-pandemic processing times?

Answer. In many places, visa appointment wait times have returned to pre-pandemic averages. Except for first time B1/B2 visitors in certain countries, wait times for all other nonimmigrant visa (NIV) categories, including students and temporary workers, are at or below pre-pandemic levels. The Department updates NIV wait time information on its public website weekly. Wait times vary depending on the visa category, appointment availability, and demand. The Department issued 18 percent more NIVs in the first 5 months of FY 2023 compared to the same period in FY 2019, pre-pandemic.

Question. What is the ideal time for the State Department to process the average passport renewal and what is the current average time?

Answer. Passport processing times vary throughout the year and are dependent upon workload, which traditionally increases in the lead-up to seasonal spring and summer travel. Processing times nearly matched pre-pandemic levels until application volumes reached unprecedented levels early this year. On March 24, processing times increased to 10–13 weeks for routine service and 7–9 weeks for expedited service. Our goal is to ensure the average application is processed within the service commitments. Many receive their passports weeks earlier than advertised.

Question. What steps is the State Department taking to speed up the passport approval process?

Answer. We are making every effort to tackle unprecedented demand for passports. CA has instituted an "all-hands-on-deck" posture requiring passport headquarters staff and field managers to adjudicate, has authorized over 30,000 overtime hours a month, and recruited volunteers, including re-employed annuitants, to work

in Washington, DC's satellite office. We have been aggressively recruiting since January 2022, and have successfully increased our adjudicative staff by more than 100, with another 170 candidates in the recruitment pipeline.

Question. China/COVID: How many times did the Department approve a limited waiver of inviolability (LWOI) for personnel in China related to COVID?

Answer. Starting June 2020, for each flight returning people to China, the Department approved a partial waiver of personal inviolability to allow specific U.S. diplomats and/or their family members to be tested for COVID upon their arrival in China and then again during a quarantine period. In May 2022, Embassy Beijing requested, and the Department approved, a partial waiver of personal inviolability and an exception to Department policy to allow mission personnel to submit to "community" testing to allow our personnel to move freely about the city where they were located.

Question. Would you agree to waivers of diplomatic immunity for embassy personnel in an adversarial country like China?

Answer. If faced with the same extraordinary situation like we had in China and other countries during the pandemic, I would again instruct all posts to push back against unreasonable or invasive restrictions applied to our diplomatic personnel and staff while considering limited waivers of immunity to permit testing and other, less intrusive, health measures. I would evaluate whether a waiver would be contrary to the U.S. Government's interests and whether it would pose a security problem for the mission, its personnel, or family members. I would also weigh this against the need to maintain diplomatic presence in country.

Question. Do you commit to consult with Congress before taking any steps to approve any waiver of inviolability (LWOI) for personnel in an adversarial country?

Answer. If presented with a similar decision on limited waivers of diplomatic immunity for embassy personnel during a pandemic or other global health crisis, I would weigh the merits of the decision while considering all aspects of the situation, including the impact on the U.S. national security interests and personnel in that country.

Question. Does the Department commit not to nominate or re-nominate to a Senate-confirmed position any officials who were involved in developing or approving the policy to comply with the PRC's COVID protocols, including detention in fever clinics, invasive, non-transparent testing procedures, and arbitrary movement restrictions and lockdowns, family separation, and the limited waivers of inviolability that allowed these practices to happen?

Answer. The President makes decisions with respect to nominating or re-nominating officials to Senate-confirmed positions. The Department has a robust process for choosing Chiefs of Mission candidates to recommend to the President for nomination. I am committed to working with the rest of my team to ensure the Department continues to identify individuals with demonstrated relevant experience and a track record of successful leadership in challenging posts.

Question. In briefings to SFRC staff and in formal front-channel communications, the Department confirmed that 30 Americans had been detained in Chinese fever clinics. Following press reports on the situation at Mission China, this number was revised to 16. What accounts for the change in the number of Americans the Department says were detained in Chinese fever clinics?

Answer. Thirty personnel tested positive for COVID upon return to China. Of these 30, 16 spent some period in a facility of the kind characterized in press reports as "fever hospitals." The 14 others were cleared in the confirmatory process or intermediate steps and did not proceed to such a facility.

Question. During which period of time and under what definitions of "American," and "detained," were these figures determined?

Answer. "American" in this context refers to a U.S. Mission China U.S. direct hire employee or family member. "Detained" means that an American was housed in a facility under the protocol steps of the PRC health regulations for having tested positive for COVID. The period of time was the return of Mission China diplomatic staff and personnel to China after authorized departure in June 2020, until Ambassador Burns arrived in Beijing and assumed duties as chief of mission in March 2022.

Question. When the United States re-imposed COVID testing requirements for Chinese citizens traveling to the United States, did the PRC Embassy submit an

LWOI or equivalent in order for its diplomats to comply when entering the United States?

Answer. Under the U.S. testing requirements, travelers from China were required to test pre-departure in China and not upon arrival in the United States. The United States did not impose testing on PRC diplomats in the United States. Pre-flight testing of PRC diplomats in China does not implicate their immunity and therefore would not require a limited waiver of inviolability (LWOI).

Question. Fifteen to 20 years to build an embassy is far too long and is one of the factors in the increasing cost of building posts abroad. Please explain why it takes so long to build an embassy and why it is so expensive.

Answer. Building worldwide embassy compounds to U.S. design codes and security standards is a complex and stringently regulated undertaking. While implementation of the 2022 Secure Embassy Construction and Counterterrorism Act will improve efficiencies, the Department has identified that U.S. Government acquisition regulations; unique local host country zoning, permits, construction practices and labor laws; security risks; and evolving climate threats add to project cost and duration. Although some complex projects with difficult site acquisitions can take upward of 15 years, the average new embassy compound takes 6 to 8 years to complete from design to occupancy.

Question. Are there authorities or other resources the Department needs to build new embassies and consulates more quickly?

Answer. Recent legislative changes such as the Secure Embassy Construction and Counterterrorism Act of 2022 provide the Department increased flexibility for set-back, co-location, site selection, and design and construction solutions that will allow us to deliver projects more quickly. Additional federal contracting and security compliance review options would further increase flexibilities by expanding the available contractor pool, increase competitive bidding, and allow for an optimal project delivery solution. Adjusting threshold mandates to accommodate for inflation will also streamline project delivery duration.

Question. Do you believe that there are posts where U.S. diplomats struggle to get outside of embassy or consulate on a regular basis? If so, where?

Answer. Our regional security offices and emergency action committees continually evaluate threat environments, risk tolerance, and available risk mitigation measures to facilitate diplomatic engagements outside embassies to the maximum extent possible. In 2021, 94 percent of movements requested at our highest threat posts were approved. In 2022, 11,528 more moves were requested at our highest threat posts versus 2021, and 93 percent of those movements were approved.

Question. Do Chinese, Russian, or Iranian diplomats have trouble accessing local populations in countries in which they operate?

Answer. The Bureau of Diplomatic Security does not monitor or track foreign diplomatic engagements domestically or abroad. However, foreign diplomats have traditionally been targeted less than U.S. Government personnel and, per open source reporting, Chinese and Russian diplomats may be engaging more frequently in certain high threat locations, but they pay a great cost for doing so. In the last 6 months, Russian diplomats in Kabul, for example, were killed in front of their embassy. A Chinese delegation was also present during an attack at the Afghanistan Ministry of Foreign Affairs, while visiting members of the Taliban in their offices.

Question. How do you intend to improve the access of U.S. diplomats to local populations at our posts abroad, especially in high-threat posts where embassy rules make getting off the compound difficult or nearly impossible?

Answer. The security and threat environment at a given post has a direct impact on a post's ability to safely facilitate engagements. Our regional security offices and emergency action committees continually evaluate threat environments, risk tolerance, and available risk mitigation measures to facilitate diplomatic engagements outside embassies to the maximum extent possible. In 2021, 94 percent of off-compound movements requested at our highest threat posts were approved. In 2022, off-compound movement requests increased by 11,528 at our highest threat posts, and 93 percent of requests were approved.

Question. The Bureau of Diplomatic Security frequently cites statistics on the number of travel requests abroad that regional security officers approve. Do those statistics include the number of requests that were never submitted to the RSO because there was no faith that the RSO would approve the request?

Answer. Travel policies at a given post are the shared product of the Emergency Action Committee, with the ultimate approver of any travel request being the Chief of Mission, not the RSO. We have no statistics or information for requests not made, and we are proud of both the approval rate and increasing rate of engagement worldwide, particularly at our high threat/high risk posts.

Question. Is that statistic useful if it doesn't include the potentially large number of requests that are never submitted due to lack of faith in approval?

Answer. Both the 2021 and 2022 statistics convey the extensive efforts our security personnel undertake daily to safely facilitate diplomatic engagements worldwide, and the increasing rate at which we are undertaking such engagements. We have no statistics or information for requests not made, and we are proud of both the approval rate and increasing rate of engagement worldwide, particularly at our high threat/high risk posts.

Question. Should the Department increase the number of Diplomatic Security officers to better staff priorities and avoid DS personnel burnout?

Answer. The health and well-being of our security personnel is of utmost importance. I understand the sacrifices our diplomatic security personnel make to keep our people safe. The Department continues to look at solutions to alleviate the pressure of increased protective operations, ensure that personnel are compensated for the long hours worked, and expand our overseas missions to mitigate personnel burnout. If additional positions are required, the Department will work to identify those resources.

Question. State Department Authorization: The Department has been late in providing requests or feedback to our committee on State Department authorization, making it difficult or at points impossible to include some Department asks. How can the State Department work in a more positive manner with our committee on State Department authorization bills?

Answer. I am pleased the Department and Congress have reinvigorated the State authorization bill process, including through the Department submitting legislative proposals to committee staff and working the committees to address feedback and refine the proposals. I deeply appreciate that the Department of State Authorization Act of 2022 included many provisions that the Department requested. As we are moving into the next year of this process, it is my hope that our teams will work collectively to further streamline the process to allow for even more constructive discussions, direct redline edits where possible, and real-time engagement with a particular focus on including Department priorities.

Question. Do you commit to providing all of the Department's authorization requests by April 14, 2023?

Answer. I recognize and appreciate that working together to develop flexible authorization legislation for the Department is an important process premised on close and transparent communication. The Department has already submitted nearly 30 legislative proposals for Congress' consideration. I remain committed to working within the Department and with interagency partners to identify and propose to Congress in a timely manner authorities for Department operations that will help the Department advance U.S. foreign policy objectives and take care of our employees both domestically and aboard.

Question. Medical Clearances: Though the Department provides medical clearances to officers prior to a permanent change station abroad, it does not evaluate officers for fitness for duty. I have heard from embassies that foreign service officers are being allowed to serve abroad, even while in hospice or under other terminal health situations. Should the Department be assigning personnel abroad who are terminally ill?

Answer. Prior to each overseas assignment the Department issues medical clearances in a manner that is consistent with federal law and Department policy. Currently, the Department issues a class 1 clearance to those with no significant medical condition or a class 2 clearance for those persons for whom the degree of care required for their condition matches the care available at their assigned post. Employees with unstable medical conditions (including unstable terminal conditions) are issued a class 5 clearance and are limited to service within the United States.

Question. What is the purpose of a medical clearance if it does not indicate whether someone is fit for service?

Answer. The medical clearance process is designed to identify medical, mental health, and educational needs that may require specialty management, follow-up, or

monitoring. The Department personnel dedicated to adjudicating medical clearances evaluate the health information identified to match the medical needs of personnel and family members with available resources at the post of assignment. At present, the Department will not “clear” an individual (or their family members) to go to a post that does not have adequate resources to meet their medical needs.

Question. Does a Foreign Service Officer have a “right” to die abroad while working for the State Department?

Answer. The Department works diligently to ensure our employees and their family members are assigned to posts where they can obtain the medical care needed to support the medical conditions with which they may be living. In the event an individual’s condition deteriorates to the point where local resources cannot provide adequate care, the Department, consistent with 22 U.S.C. 4081, will evacuate the employee and/or their family either back to the United States or to a regional medical evacuation center where the care they need can be obtained.

Question. Given the small number of posts who can handle class 2 cases, does the Department risk overwhelming the capacity of those embassy medical units?

Answer. The Department recognizes that healthcare is not the same industry today as it was when the class 2 designation was first defined.

Breakthroughs in technology, pharmaceuticals, and service delivery, among other things, have created a world in which we see individuals with a class 2 clearance serving at nearly every post around the world. As a result, those with a class 2 clearance are placed at posts throughout the world, and the Department consistently monitors health unit capacity so that none are at risk for being overwhelmed.

Question. What resources would be needed to require fitness for duty evaluations for all officers prior to permanently changing stations abroad?

Answer. “Fitness for duty” is an evaluation that currently only applies to diplomatic security agents, and even then, is only applied when such fitness comes into question. Requiring fitness for duty evaluations for all foreign service officers would initially require the Department to establish fitness standards that would apply to every job series for which it hires, most of which are jobs with limited to no physical requirements. Based on those fitness standards, the Department would need to craft a program that includes individual assessments for each job series and then evaluate each employee’s ability to meet the standards before entering on duty, much like onboarding diplomatic security special agents.

Question. Foreign Service Worldwide Availability: The Department recently agreed to limit severely the definition of worldwide availability and has not been responsive to my requests for a briefing on the situation. What do the words “worldwide availability” mean to you?

Answer. Under the revised minimum medical qualification standard for Department of State career foreign service generalists and specialists, except medical specialists, applicants will need to be medically cleared to serve at all designated regional medical evacuation centers (currently Bangkok, London, Pretoria, and Singapore). A separate revised minimum medical qualification standard has been agreed to for medical specialists. Assignments will not be limited to those four posts, and employees—including those with a disability—will be expected to bid competitively and serve at a wide variety of posts based upon the needs of the service.

Question. Has the Department effectively eliminated “worldwide availability” by reducing it to just a handful of posts?

Answer. The revised minimum medical qualification standard recently adopted by the Department will be used only to determine whether an applicant is medically qualified for hire and will not be used to define or limit the universe of posts at which the applicant can serve. Employees, including those with a disability, will be expected to serve at a wide variety of posts. Adoption of the revised minimum medical qualification standard is an important step forward in the Department’s efforts to create a workforce that reflects the full diversity of the American people and ensure we have the best team representing the United States abroad.

Question. I frequently hear from the Department and its personnel that the Foreign Service is akin to the U.S. armed forces. Does the change in definition of “worldwide” availability diminish the similarities between the Foreign Service and our armed forces? If yes, does that demand a reevaluation of employee benefits for the Foreign Service?

Answer. The revised minimum medical qualification standard recently adopted by the Department will be used only to determine whether an applicant is medically

qualified for hire and will not be used to define or limit the universe of posts at which the applicant can serve. Career foreign service candidates will still be expected to serve at a wide variety of posts around the world, and the revised minimum medical qualification standard is expected to enable the Department to meet its foreign policy and national security mission at posts throughout the globe.

Question. HUMAN RIGHTS, DEMOCRACY, AND INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS—International Organizations: The budget request includes \$344 million to pay a portion of the UN peacekeeping “arrears” that have accrued over the last several years. These arrears are a result of a disagreement between the UN and the United States on the “scales of assessment”—a formula used by the UN to determine the amount member states are expected to contribute for the general and peacekeeping budgets. Per U.S. law, the United States will only pay up to 25 percent of the UN peacekeeping budget. However, the UN “assesses” the United States at a rate of up to 27.9 percent (now 29.6 for the next 3 years). Will you pledge to withhold payment of U.S. peacekeeping arrears until the UN establishes a 25 percent cap on contributions by any single nation?

Answer. We believe that other countries can and should assume more of the financial burden for UN peacekeeping. We also believe that the United States’ influence at the UN, our ability to strengthen the integrity of the rules-based international system, and our ability to lead reform efforts is greatest when we pay our bills in full and on time.

Question. Would you agree that paying back peacekeeping arrears before securing the 25 percent assessment rate would be giving away any leverage in the negotiations? Why or why not?

Answer. We believe that other countries can and should assume more of the financial burden for UN peacekeeping. However, once the UN General Assembly has reached agreement on the distribution of financial responsibility, each country should uphold their responsibility to pay their share. I would welcome the opportunity to discuss this issue further in the context of the next negotiation on how much each country contributes.

Question. As memorialized in the 1999 Helms-Biden agreement, the Late Ambassador Holbrooke, then-President Clinton, then-Secretary General Kofi Anan, and then-Senator Biden all believed that the United States has no obligation to pay, and thus should not pay, the roughly \$500 million in “contested arrears” that were explicitly excluded from the \$1.6 billion Helms-Biden agreement. However, since then, the UN has insisted upon keeping on its books, and the Obama administration and the Biden administration has sought to pay over Congressional objections. Do you commit not to pay these “contested arrears” per Congressional intent as outlined in the Helms-Biden agreement?

Answer. My firm belief is that the United States should pay its assessed contributions in full and on time, while concurrently working to reduce those contributions by maximizing efficiencies and encouraging other member states to assume more of the financial burden. As indicated in the President’s FY 2024 budget request, the Department is seeking funds and authority from Congress to enable payment of peacekeeping arrears that accrued over the past 4 years. These arrears are not subject to the Helms-Biden agreement.

Question. Are there any specific steps you believe the UN should take to reduce the overall size of the UN peacekeeping budget? If so, what are they?

Answer. UN Security Council mandates are the primary drivers for the budgetary size of each peacekeeping mission. In these mandates, the United States works to require missions to develop transition strategies focused on concrete objectives and to ensure missions have an exit strategy. Once the secretary-general proposes a budget, we work to ensure that the budget levels agreed to by the UN General Assembly are appropriately sized to each mission by finding opportunities to achieve efficiencies and contain costs to reduce the overall size of the UN peacekeeping budget.

Question. Are there any specific UN peacekeeping missions you would support reducing or terminating in order to reduce UN peacekeeping costs? If so, what active and ongoing missions do you believe should be reduced or terminated?

Answer. The United States supports terminating the UN Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK), which has long since fulfilled its original purpose. Unfortunately, Russia and its UNSC partners have blocked efforts to end the mission. The United States also supports ongoing, mandated drawdowns of the UN Organization Stabilization Mission in the DRC (MONUSCO) and the African Union Transition Mission in So-

malia (ATMIS). We continue to insist those transitions remain conditions-based; informed by joint UN/host government planning; and attentive to the security needs of vulnerable populations.

Question. The resumption of funds to the controversial UN organization, UNRWA, has amounted to close to \$1 billion since the start of the Biden administration and very few reforms have been made. Please provide an explanation of the reforms initially laid out prior to the resumption of funds and if or if not those have been undertaken.

Answer. U.S. contributions to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) give the United States a seat at the table to help strengthen UNRWA's programs and oversight. Since the resumption of U.S. funding, UNRWA has made significant reforms. For example, as committed in the U.S.-UNRWA Framework for Cooperation, UNRWA inspected 87 percent of its facilities at least twice in 2021 and 100 percent in 2022 to confirm they were safe and adhered to the Agency's neutrality policies, up from just 28 percent in 2020. With targeted U.S. funding, UNRWA also modernized its financial and whistleblower policies to ensure alignment with global best practice and is in the process of introducing digital refugee identity verification to prevent fraud.

Question. Do you believe that UNRWA is meeting its mandate? Why or why not?

Answer. Yes. The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) is mandated by the UN General Assembly to provide essential services directly to Palestinian refugees in its five fields of operation. UNRWA's activities include providing emergency services, education, health, protection, and livelihoods programming for Palestinian refugees, all of which are within its mandate. UNRWA plays an essential role in promoting stability in the region, which benefits the United States and our regional partners, including Israel.

Question. Please explain efforts by the USG to encourage UNRWA to diversify its donor funds.

Answer. The United States has frequently encouraged the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) to diversify its donor funding. This includes advocacy with traditional donors and regional partners, including significant engagement with Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and Qatar. UN Secretary-General Guterres has also engaged potential donors directly on UNRWA's behalf. In 2022, several of these donors announced new funding for UNRWA, including Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Japan, Norway, and the European Union. The U.S. Government will continue to encourage contributions to UNRWA to help reduce the Agency's financial shortfalls.

Question. In recent engagements with the Palestinian Authority, did you discuss UNRWA's failure to meet one of its core mandates, neutrality? Why or why not?

Answer. The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) continues to implement essential regulations regarding UNRWA and its staff's neutrality, integrity, and impartiality. The United States engages regularly with the Palestinian Authority on a wide range of issues related to UNRWA, including the agency's commitment to humanitarian principles, including neutrality. We are committed to continue working with UNRWA to promote its provision of effective and efficient assistance with transparency and accountability in a manner consistent with the principles of neutrality, tolerance, respect for human rights, and non-discrimination.

Question. What was the result?

Answer. In these meetings, the Department has underscored the Administration is seeking to re-build our relationship with the Palestinian Authority (PA) and the Palestinian people on a basis of trust, cooperation, and shared values that advance respect for the human rights of all. As part of these efforts, the Administration also is fully committed to working with UNRWA and the PA to root out any problematic content in textbooks, to build the capacity of UNRWA's teachers, and to monitor UNRWA's efforts. UNRWA's schools are often the only option for many Palestinian refugee children.

Question. What are your views on the need for management reform within the UN system?

Answer. An efficient, effective UN is essential to achieving America's strategic objectives. We consistently work to ensure international organizations in the UN system adhere to the best management and oversight practices in the areas of protecting whistleblowers, ensuring accountability for sexual exploitation and abuse,

promoting zero tolerance for corruption, and ensuring financial and managerial transparency.

Question. What has the Administration done in regards to UNOPS controversial investments?

Answer. U.S.-led efforts to reform the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS) require the organization to return to a focus on its core mandate to expand implementation capacity for UN entities and member states; suspend the work of the unit responsible for the controversial investments; return a portion of excess reserves to partners; refrain from the pursuit of further activity regarding impact investments until approved by the Executive Board; strengthen internal controls, including ethics and audit functions; and pursue accountability of any officials involved in the fraud/mismanagement.

Question. Has there been any investigation conducted?

Answer. The UN's Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) conducted an internal investigation, the report of which has not been made public. Following the investigation, the United Nations terminated the contract of Vitaly Vanshelboim, the deputy head of the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS) and the CEO of the unit responsible for the controversial investments.

Question. Please explain your views on reform of the UN Security Council, particularly on the veto and expansion of permanent member seats.

Answer. A reformed UN Security Council, as President Biden has said, is in the best interests of the United States. We support the expansion of the permanent and non-permanent membership of the UN Security Council, including permanent seats for countries from Africa as well as Latin America and the Caribbean. However, we do not support the expansion or the alteration of the veto.

Question. The United States has rejoined the UN Human Rights Council and in the last year was able to successfully lobby for the removal of Russia from the Council over its war crimes in Ukraine. Since then, what reforms has the Biden administration advocated for?

Answer. The United States continues to seek reforms of the UN Human Rights Council (HRC), particularly with respect to its membership. The United States actively engages with allies and partners to work to keep some countries with the worst human rights records off the HRC and encourage those with better records to run for seats. The United States also encourages UN regional groups to field competitive slates, as appropriate, and press member states to more carefully consider human rights records of countries running for HRC election.

Question. Have any of these reforms gained traction?

Answer. Yes, U.S. efforts to encourage countries with better human rights records to run for seats on the Human Rights Council (HRC) and across UN bodies have been well received by allies and partners. In October, Venezuela lost its seat to Chile and Costa Rica in a competitive election. Additionally, during the April 2023 elections for United Nations Economic and Social Council subsidiary bodies, Russia was defeated in all the races where they ran on contested slates. Across UN bodies, the United States will continue to use our vote and influence to promote and support geographically diverse candidates that share our values and support the integrity of UN elections.

Question. Does the Biden administration believe it spends a disproportionate amount of attention on criticizing Israel?

Answer. Yes, we agree the Human Rights Council (HRC) disproportionately criticizes Israel. As an HRC member state, we remain committed to partnering with like-minded countries to reduce the amount of time spent on Israel and anti-Israel resolutions at the HRC. Though we disagree strongly with the HRC's disproportionate focus on Israel, U.S. engagement has resulted in many important achievements on the Human Rights Council, including a Commission of Inquiry on Russia's invasion of Ukraine, strong statements against PRC human rights abuses and violations in Xinjiang, and accountability mechanisms on Belarus, Iran, and Syria, among others.

Question. What steps has the Administration taken to eliminate the Commission of Inquiry (COI) established to investigate Israel?

Answer. We continue building a coalition of partners to end this open-ended and vaguely defined COI. During the March session of the Human Rights Council (HRC), Ambassador Taylor delivered a statement outlining U.S. objections to the COI. During the June 2022 session, the United States also led a joint statement

signed by a cross-regional group of over 20 countries condemning the COI's mandate. We continue to raise our concerns about bias against Israel in the UN system with the President of the HRC and High Commissioner, as well as with the Secretary-General's designee as focal point to combat antisemitism in the UN system, Under-Secretary-General Moratinos.

Question. Does the Administration believe that the Council is a productive body for the discussion of human rights? Why or why not?

Answer. Yes, the Human Rights Council is a productive body for discussing and advocating for the respect of human rights, and the U.S. presence has ensured that we can shape the HRC agenda and outcomes. In addition to ensuring resolutions unfairly targeting Israel were not adopted unanimously without a vote, we have played a key role in successful efforts to create and extend the Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine; create the first ever Special Rapporteur on the human rights situation in Russia; present the first-ever resolution on the human rights situation in Xinjiang, China; extend the Fact-Finding Mission (FFM) on Venezuela; and establish an FFM on Iran.

Question. The lack of progress on a more durable solution to cross border humanitarian operations into Syria is of grave concern to me. The recent earthquake worsened already dire conditions the Syrian people face, particularly those in the northwest. How would you or our Ambassador to the UN engage with partners in the UNSC to ensure this mandate renewal passes?

Answer. U.S. officials, including those at the U.S. Mission to the UN, consistently highlight the scale and scope of the humanitarian crisis in Syria, as well as the effectiveness and transparency of the UN cross-border assistance delivery mechanism. We will continue to vigorously engage members of the UN Security Council, both in New York and in their respective capitals, to emphasize the need to maintain and expand the authorization of UN assistance from Türkiye.

Question. Would you recommend that President Biden engage at the highest possible levels on this important issue?

Answer. We will use all available means to advocate for and support the continuation of cross-border humanitarian assistance to the people of northwest Syria, including, as appropriate, diplomacy at the highest levels.

Question. How will you work to ensure that U.S. taxpayer dollars that fund UN humanitarian assistance are not being used to effectively subsidize the Assad regime, which blockades assistance to Syrians through seizure of cross-line assistance delivery attempts?

Answer. Humanitarian partners implementing our programs in regime-held areas must put in place robust risk mitigation mechanisms before receiving funding, to ensure our aid is not diverted by the regime or other malign actors. All partners, including the UN, are required to: 1) fully cooperate with third-party monitoring to verify program implementation; 2) provide immediate updates on any interference with U.S.-funded assistance; 3) have confidential complaint mechanisms; and 4) submit reports on actual and alleged diversions, such as aid interference, fraud, waste, or abuse.

Question. Do you believe that cross-line assistance is an acceptable modality of delivery of humanitarian assistance or as an alternative to cross-border?

Answer. The United States supports expanding humanitarian access to all Syrians in need through all modalities, including both cross-border and cross-line. However, cross-line assistance to northwest Syria is not an alternative to cross-border assistance in that it cannot match the scope and scale of cross-border assistance.

Question. In the event of non-renewal of the Syria cross border mandate, what preparations have been made to continue to support Syrians with life-saving aid?

Answer. Nothing can replicate the scale of UN cross-border aid. If the UN cross-border aid mechanism is not renewed, the amount of humanitarian aid reaching people in need in northwest Syria will decrease dramatically. However, we have been preparing for this possibility in response to previous Russian veto threats. We will use all available means to advocate for and support continued cross-border humanitarian assistance to northwest Syria. This includes encouraging UN and NGO partners to pre-position supplies and expand alternative delivery approaches.

Question. Has the U.S. Government consulted with partners and allies on alternatives and contingency plans for continuing to support Syrians with life-saving aid? If so, what are those plans?

Answer. We coordinate closely with our partners and allies, including fellow donor governments and the Government of Türkiye, and with our humanitarian partners, regarding contingency plans. We would welcome the opportunity to discuss those plans in greater depth in an appropriate setting.

Question. What steps are the United Nations and UN agencies taking to appropriately plan for the event of non-renewal?

Answer. We would welcome the chance to discuss such plans in depth in a higher classification setting.

Question. Have all UN agencies operating in NW Syria adequately planned for this event?

Answer. UN agencies have contingency plans in place in the event the cross-border mandate is not re-authorized in July. However, UN contingency planning has affirmed that there is no viable alternative to the existing cross-border mechanism to provide the scale and scope of assistance currently provided by the UN.

Question. Have all UN agencies operating in NW Syria created plans for eventual hand-off to local partners if non-renewal happens?

Answer. We would welcome the chance to discuss such plans in-depth in a higher classification setting.

Question. Now that the Office of “Multilateral Personnel and Strategy” has been established, please provide your assessments of the office’s work to achieve its mission to increase Americans in the UN system and combat malign influence in international organizations.

Answer. Since its formal creation in June 2021, IO’s Office of Multilateral Strategy and Personnel (MSP) has made significant progress in increasing the numbers of U.S. entry-level talent in the UN system through the Junior Professional Officer (JPO) program, increased advocacy on behalf of U.S. applicants to UN positions, and successfully campaigned for the election of American candidates to UN leadership positions, including Doreen Bogdan-Martin’s historic election as Secretary-General of the International Telecommunication Union last year. MSP has further ensured U.S. leadership successes and combatted malign influence by working with allies and partners to advance our affirmative view of a strong, resilient, and inclusive UN.

Question. Specifically on the Junior Professional Officer (JPO) program, how can the Administration better recruit and retain talented Americans for this program?

Answer. The Department of State is employing a multi-pronged approach to increase the recruitment and retention of U.S. citizens for the Junior Professional Officer (JPO) Program, including increasing outreach opportunities through virtual or in-person recruitment and networking events, identifying strategic opportunities for entry-level placement in UN agencies such as specialized agencies that focus on emerging priorities, and continuing to foster network building and mentorship opportunities involving current U.S. citizen staff in the UN system.

Question. UNFPA: The FY 2024 Budget Request includes \$57.5 million for the UN Population Fund (UNFPA). How will you ensure that none of these funds are used in the support or participates in the management of a program of coercive abortion or involuntary stabilization in violation of the Kemp-Kasten amendment?

Answer. UNFPA does not support or participate in the management of a program of coercive abortion or involuntary sterilization. UNFPA opposes any form of coercive sexual and reproductive health policies or programs, including but not limited to forced abortion and forced sterilization, and has worked to eliminate them. UNFPA has consistently advocated for and promoted the basic right of all couples and individuals in China and globally to decide freely and responsibly the number, spacing, and timing of their children.

Question. *The UN Peacebuilding Fund:* The FY 2024 budget request includes \$1.5 million to the UN Peacebuilding Fund for the first time. Can you explain how the UN Peacebuilding fund promotes peace?

Answer. The Fund may invest with UN entities, governments, regional organizations, multilateral banks or civil society organizations to mitigate drivers of fragility and reduce the recurrence of conflict. The Fund is designed to provide a small injection of support and be a catalyst for other funding to sustainably address conflict drivers, such as by supporting the reintegration of armed group members in the Central African Republic and mitigating inter-clan disputes in Somalia. Since the Fund’s establishment in 2006, it has allocated over \$1.6 billion to 65 recipient post-conflict countries.

Question. How does the UN Peacebuilding Fund match with U.S. National Security Interests?

Answer. The Fund helps stabilize conflict-affected areas, prevents conflict recurrence, and contributes to the UN's Sustainable Development Goals. Fund resources address issues such as human rights, Women, Peace and Security, institution building, transitional justice, and electoral processes. The Fund additionally complements UN special political mission resourcing. As it oversees synergy with the Fund, U.S. leadership on the Peacebuilding Commission ensures constructive advice to the Security Council and supports implementation of the Global Fragility Act.

Question. UNESCO: The U.S. ceased funding to UNESCO because it granted Palestinians full membership. U.S. code (P.L. 101-146 and P.L. 103-236) prohibits the U.S. from funding any organization which grants full membership to the Palestinians. The FY 2024 budget request includes \$150 million in payments of arrears to UNESCO. Why is the Administration requesting money to pay arrears which are a direct result of Palestinian membership?

Answer. The FY 2023 appropriations act includes a waiver authority that, if exercised, would allow the United States to provide contributions to UNESCO. The President's FY 2024 budget request includes approximately \$75 million to pay an assessed contribution to UNESCO and \$75 million to pay a portion of accumulated U.S. arrears, a total of \$150 million.

The Department's request for arrears is equally as important as funding for assessed contributions. Should the United States resume UNESCO membership without addressing arrears such as through a payment plan, the UNESCO Constitution will not allow us to serve on the Executive Board nor vote in the General Conference, limiting our ability to advance U.S. interests in the organization.

Question. If paid, how will the arrears be distributed?

Answer. The FY 2023 appropriations act includes a presidential waiver authority that, if exercised, would allow the United States to provide contributions to UNESCO. Any decision on the use of a potential arrears payment can only be taken by the UNESCO General Conference.

Any U.S. contributions provided to pay outstanding assessments would initially be credited to the UNESCO general fund, pending General Conference consideration of a proposal by the UNESCO director-general on the use of the funds.

Question. Will the money be returned to other members including the Palestinians?

Answer. UNESCO reduced its budget to account for unpaid U.S. contributions while the United States was still a member and not paying assessed contributions. Accordingly, while a decision by the General Conference would be made on the use of funds, including application of those funds to future UNESCO projects in member states, we would not expect U.S. contributions, such as for arrears, to go to member states as a result of previously unpaid U.S. contributions.

Question. Summit for Democracy: In 2021, I submitted a question for the record (QFR) about the Summit for Democracy, which stated: "The budget includes programming for democracy, human rights, freedom, and the rule of law which we welcome. It also references the Administration's plan for a Summit of Democracy. What definition of democracy will be you using for inviting countries to participate?"

Answer. We did not use a specific definition of democracy in deciding which countries to invite to the two summits. As with the first summit, the second was meant to be inclusive of a regionally and socioeconomically diverse group of well-established as well as emerging democracies. We approached the two summits with a clear-eyed recognition that no democracy is perfect nor the same as another.

Question. Can you please tell us more details of this Summit and its goals?

Answer. The second Summit for Democracy gathered democratic leaders, civil society partners, and the private sector for 3 days of hybrid programming in Washington and co-host countries. The second summit focused on how democracies deliver economic prosperity, access to justice, respect for human rights for citizens, and how democracies are best suited to address the world's most pressing challenges. The U.S. held an in-person event specifically devoted to exploring how to help ensure that technology contributes to and does not detract from democracy.

Question. Two years later, one summit completed, what is your assessment of Summit(s)?

Answer. The summit process has re-energized democracies abroad and helped demonstrate how democracies deliver for their citizens. It strengthened and ex-

panded partnerships with governments and non-governmental partners to take meaningful action on over 750 commitments made at the first summit. The Presidential Initiative for Democratic Renewal has rolled out new initiatives to combat corruption, support media freedom, protect human rights, and counter the misuse of technology, including new guidelines for democracies on surveillance.

Question. Do you feel that the Summit for Democracy has achieved the goals initially laid out? Why or why not?

Answer. Yes. The summit has demonstrated how democracies deliver for their citizens and how democracies are best suited to address the world's most pressing challenges. The goal of re-energizing democratic countries and partners was achieved in several ways: the 16 democracy cohorts that launched (in partnership with civil society); over 70 governments and authorities endorsing a declaration affirming political commitments; and more than 20 partners joining a commitment to enhance beneficial ownership transparency.

Question. Does the Administration have a plan for post-Summit?

Answer. The Administration will be working with the Republic of Korea, which has announced it will host a third summit. We will encourage our embassies and civil society interlocutors to help countries and authorities implement the commitments they have made. The Department of State and USAID will also follow-up from headquarters to fulfill the ambitious goals laid out at the summit. Summit efforts will also continue through several democracy cohorts, including the two U.S.-led cohorts.

Question. What steps are in place to hold countries accountable for their commitments made during the summit(s) or "year of action" in between?

Answer. At the first summit, nearly 100 participating governments and authorities made commitments related to democratic renewal and were invited to submit progress reports on their implementation. Additional accountability has been provided by non-governmental organizations, such as Accountability Lab, the Open Government Partnership, and International IDEA, which developed commitment trackers. The United States will continue to work with a range of multi-stakeholder initiatives to track progress on summit commitments.

Question. Why were democratic groups omitted from participation in the Summit such as the National Unity Government of Burma?

Answer. Representatives from the National Unity Government (NUG) were featured speakers in summit-related events, including a panel discussion hosted by the United States Institute of Peace on Burma that included DRL Acting Assistant Secretary Erin Barclay. We regularly engage with the NUG as part of larger outreach and engagement with Burma's pro-democracy movement. The Summit for Democracy aimed to be inclusive and representative of a regionally and socioeconomically diverse slate of countries and democratic actors.

Question. Since August 2021, thousands of Afghans and Americans have been evacuated to the U.S. and Congress formally established the CARE Office. How many Americans remain in Afghanistan? Of this number, how many have expressed their intent to depart via USG channels?

Answer. The number of U.S. citizens in Afghanistan fluctuates regularly as individuals enter and depart Afghanistan. U.S. citizens are not required to provide the U.S. Government their travel plans. The number of U.S. citizens remaining in Afghanistan, as tracked by CARE via their database management system known as FALCON, is 115. Of these, approximately 40 percent are waiting for their family members' immigration cases to become interview-ready so that CARE can manifest them to CAS for further processing. For the other 60 percent, the Department of State has no record of any immigrant visa application. The primary applicant American citizens attached to these cases choose to remain in Afghanistan with their family.

They may travel with USG assistance or by their own means. The State Department provides immediate relocation assistance to any U.S. citizen who is in touch with the Department and who requests such assistance.

Question. How many post-COM SIV principal applicants remain in Afghanistan?

Answer. The Department does not track the location of SIV applicants until they are interview-ready and their case files are assigned to the visa processing post where their consular interviews will occur outside Afghanistan. The Department prioritizes and schedules visa interview appointments for Afghan SIV applicants able to travel outside of Afghanistan at any immigrant visa post where they are able

to appear. The Department continues its efforts to facilitate the safe and orderly travel of Afghan allies and their eligible family members who wish to leave Afghanistan.

Question. How many Americans and Afghans remain in Albania?

Answer. To date, I am not aware of any U.S. citizens in Albania with their Afghan family members. Of the Afghan individuals presently in Albania, the U.S. Government relocated a limited number from Afghanistan. The remainder arrived in Albania through other non-USG channels. We continue to process all Afghans in Albania who are eligible for relocation under Enduring Welcome. We cannot provide specific numbers of Afghans in this response, but would be happy to provide this information in a closed session.

Question. How many Americans and Afghans remain in Kosovo?

Answer. We would be happy to provide this information in a closed session. We continue to process all Afghans in Kosovo who are eligible for relocation under Enduring Welcome.

Question. What is the Department's plan to ensure this population is able to depart Afghanistan, should they wish?

Answer. CARE immediately manifests for relocation out of Afghanistan every U.S. citizen and Legal Permanent Resident (LPR) who requests relocation assistance. CARE is aware of several U.S. citizens and LPRs in Afghanistan who are ready and willing to leave the country, and we are in touch with these individuals and are actively working to relocate them. CARE welcomes being apprised of any American citizen or LPR cases, by phone, email, WhatsApp, or any other method, in order to immediately effect their departure.

Question. Please provide an overview of how evacuation flights are administratively operated, including the process in which flights are selected, the manifests, and the routes to Camp As-Sayliyah (CAS) in Qatar.

Answer. CARE works with a contractor providing commercial air services to prepare and relocate eligible Afghans out of Kabul to platforms in third countries. Routes and cadence are planned according to commercial and safety standards to meet CARE operational requirements and in cooperation with host nations willing to accept eligible Afghans and permit the U.S. Government to process Special Immigrant Visas, Immigrant Visas, and U.S. Refugee Admissions Program cases. Manifests are created by a logistics team, drawing from a population of Afghans who are vetted and travel-ready.

Question. *UN Cybercrime Treaty:* Congress has received numerous updates regarding the U.S. effort to negotiate a UN "Cybercrime Treaty," but concerns remain about scope and intent. Does the Department intend to submit the Treaty to the United States Senate upon completion?

Answer. Within the Ad Hoc Committee process, the United States continues to work towards consensus on a narrowly focused criminal justice instrument that advances three core priorities: increasing international cooperation to fight cybercrime, respecting human rights, and supporting multistakeholder engagement. The United States will analyze the finalized treaty text to determine whether it is in line with U.S. interests before signing and submitting to the Senate for advice and consent if appropriate.

Question. What steps is the Department taking to ensure that any new agreement remains compatible with existing international agreements like the Budapest Convention?

Answer. The United States is working towards a UN treaty that complements the Budapest Convention and can be ratified by both Budapest and non-Budapest member states. The United States is working closely with other Budapest member states participating in the UN cybercrime treaty negotiations to ensure that any new treaty is consistent with and complementary to the Budapest Convention. Since Ad Hoc Committee treaty negotiations began, three countries have joined the Budapest Convention.

Question. In what ways have Authoritarian states attempted to subvert the stated intent of the UN Cybercrime Treaty during negotiations?

Answer. Russia and its allies are endeavoring to leverage this process to advance their positions supporting government control of communication technologies. They are pushing proposals that would compel States Parties to cooperate in criminal cases without sufficient safeguards, including for human rights and fundamental freedoms, such as the freedom of expression. The United States and its like-minded

partners have been successful in countering these Russian-driven proposals by pushing for a narrowly tailored criminal justice instrument.

Question. What steps are you taking to prevent these countries, particularly Russia and the PRC, from rewriting key definitions or attempting to reinterpret or sidestep longstanding international standards and best practices that the United States supports?

Answer. The United States is seeking to use established terms and definitions that are consistent with U.S. law and well-known to the international community of law enforcement practitioners. Some member states, including Russia and its allies, are proposing new concepts, terms and definitions that are incongruent with longstanding international norms and existing agreements. The United States has and will continue to advance strategic coordination with its like-minded partners to oppose such proposals, and to secure agreement for language reflecting international best practices, standards, norms, and definitions.

Question. The Chinese Communist Party has put forth a consideration to consider criminalizing “Dissemination of False Information” in the fourth round of negotiations in Vienna. Is the Department aware of this proposal and what is the plan to combat using such language to accomplish malign means?

Answer. The language proposed by the PRC is deeply concerning to the United States. The United States has and will continue to engage broadly with other countries to build support for a narrowly tailored criminal justice instrument and to oppose any proposals that directly cater to authoritarian regimes.

Question. Understanding that there is a lack of agreement or unity of definition on key terms relating to Cyber and Cyber security, please provide working definitions for “cyber” as it relates to negotiation for the treaty.

Answer. The United States has proposed drawing on the terms and definitions used in the Budapest Convention, which has been an effective international cybercrime treaty for two decades. In the context of the UN treaty negotiation process, the United States has not proposed a definition for the term “cyber,” and does not believe a definition of “cyber” is necessary in this convention. The United States is seeking consensus on definitions consistent with the provisions of the Budapest Convention and U.S. domestic criminal law, neither of which includes a definition of “cyber.”

Question. Understanding that there is a lack of agreement or unity of definition on key terms relating to Cyber and Cyber security, please provide working definitions for “crime” as it relates to negotiation for the treaty.

Answer. The United States has proposed drawing on the terms and definitions used in the Budapest Convention, which has been an effective international cybercrime treaty for two decades. In this context, the United States has not proposed a definition for the term “crime,” and does not believe a definition of “crime” is necessary in this convention.

Question. Understanding that there is a lack of agreement or unity of definition on key terms relating to Cyber and Cyber security, please provide working definitions for “computer” as it relates to negotiation for the treaty.

Answer. The United States has proposed drawing on the terms and definitions used in the Budapest Convention, which has been an effective international cybercrime treaty for two decades. In this context, the United States has not proposed a definition for the term “computer,” but has proposed definitions for the terms “computer system” and “computer data” drawn from the Budapest Convention.

Question. Understanding that there is a lack of agreement or unity of definition on key terms relating to Cyber and Cyber security, please provide working definitions for “cybercrime” as it relates to negotiation for the treaty.

Answer. The United States has proposed drawing on the terms and definitions used in the Budapest Convention, which has been an effective international cybercrime treaty for two decades. In this context, the United States has proposed that “cybercrime” be defined to mean those offenses that are established under the convention. The United States is seeking to use established terms and definitions that are consistent with U.S. law and well-known to the international community of law enforcement practitioners.

Question. Understanding that there is a lack of agreement or unity of definition on key terms relating to Cyber and Cyber security, please provide working definitions for “cyberattack” as it relates to negotiation for the treaty.

Answer. The United States has proposed drawing on the terms and definitions used in the Budapest Convention, which has been an effective international cybercrime treaty for two decades. The United States has not proposed a definition for the term “cyberattack,” and does not believe a definition of “cyberattack,” which implicates topics that are beyond the scope of this treaty, is necessary.

Question. Does the International Criminal Court have jurisdiction over U.S. citizens?

Answer. I continue to strongly disagree with the International Criminal Court’s prior actions relating to the Afghanistan situation with regard to U.S. personnel and maintain our longstanding objection to the Court’s assertion of jurisdiction over U.S. personnel.

Question. Does the International Criminal Court have jurisdiction over citizens of Israel?

Answer. As I conveyed publicly, the United States firmly opposes the opening of the investigation by the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court (ICC) into the Palestinian situation. The ICC has no jurisdiction over this matter. The United States does not believe that the Palestinians qualify as a sovereign state and therefore they are not qualified to obtain membership as a state, or participate as a state, in international organizations, entities, or conferences, including the ICC. The United States maintains the position that the ICC should focus on its core mission of serving as the court of last resort in punishing and deterring atrocity crimes.

Question. What steps is the Administration taking to ensure that the open investigation into U.S. personnel in Afghanistan is closed?

Answer. I continue to object to the International Criminal Court’s previous attempt to assert jurisdiction over U.S. personnel. I believe our concerns are best addressed through engagement with all stakeholders. On April 4, an ICC appeals chamber issued a judgment clearing the way for the prosecutor to investigate ongoing abuses by the Islamic State-Khorasan Province and the Taliban, in line with the prosecutor’s decision to de-prioritize other aspects of the Afghanistan investigation. I am deeply concerned about the deterioration of the human rights situation in Afghanistan, including allegations of atrocities and the persecution of women, girls, journalists, rights activists, and members of religious and ethnic minority groups, and welcome efforts to pursue accountability for such acts.

Question. Does the term “human rights” include a right to access an abortion?

Answer. The United States is not a party to any international human rights treaty that enumerates a right to abortion. The United States recognizes that everyone has the right to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health, including for sexual and reproductive health.

Question. The funding requested for the Human Rights and Democracy Fund (HRDF) is \$180.7 million—a decrease from the FY 2023 enacted level of \$222.45 million. Could you elaborate how the State Department intends to address troubling democratic trends with this decrease in funding?

Answer. While the budget request for Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor’s (DRL) FY 2024 Human Rights and Democracy Fund (HRDF) funding is less than the FY 2023 enacted level for HRDF, the overall USG Democracy, Human Rights, and Governance request level in FY 2024 increased by \$250 million from the FY 2023 request. The Department employs a range of diplomatic and programmatic tools to address troubling democratic trends globally. Our resources, including HRDF, are used for targeted democracy and human rights programs that are designed to combat democratic erosion and other threats to democracy that operate in lockstep with our bilateral, multistakeholder, and bilateral initiatives.

Question. How can the Department adequately support civil society actors abroad to prevent further democratic backsliding?

Answer. The Department supports civil society through several foreign assistance programs, in addition to ongoing diplomatic engagement. Some build the capacity of civil society to promote democracy and human rights and hold their governments accountable. Others support civil society and human rights defenders when they come under threat through several rapid response and emergency assistance programs.

Question. Atrocity Prevention: The Administration’s FY 2024 budget request does not include specific funding for atrocity prevention writ large and specifically for the Task Force. Could you please explain the rationale for the omission and elaborate on the reasoning why?

Answer. The Department utilizes current funding, including funds not specifically earmarked for atrocity prevention, to support the Atrocity Prevention Task Force in implementing the United States Strategy to Anticipate, Prevent, and Respond to Atrocities, including both prevention and response work. This includes programmatic and diplomatic efforts, drawing from various funding resources from different operating units, as well as engagement with civil society and likeminded governments and multilateral actors.

Question. Does this omission indicate that atrocities prevention and response is not a priority of the Administration despite the requirements of the Elie Wiesel Genocide and Atrocities Prevention Act?

Answer. The Atrocity Prevention Task Force continues to fulfill the requirements of the Elie Wiesel Act, including expanding the number of individuals trained in atrocity prevention and widening the scope of the training targets to include inter-agency and multilateral partners. The Task Force will refine the Elie Wiesel Act annual report to ensure the 2023 report provides greater clarity and detail on the atrocity prevention work of the Task Force and its participating departments and agencies, including work in specific country contexts.

Question. What resources does the State Department require to successfully implement the Elie Wiesel Act and Atrocities Prevention Strategy?

Answer. Utilizing the current atrocity prevention resources, the Atrocity Prevention Task Force continues to implement the U.S. Strategy to Anticipate, Prevent, and Respond to Atrocities, engaging in prevention, response, and recovery work. This includes programmatic work, diplomatic efforts, engagement with and support for civil society, and partnering with likeminded governments and multilateral actors. It also involves building capacity in affected communities; supporting justice, including accountability and services for survivors; and synchronizing efforts between aligned work streams, including the Global Fragility Act, the Updated U.S. Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Gender-Based Violence, and the Women, Peace, and Security agenda.

Question. Does the State Department plan to mandate training for key personnel, particularly foreign service officers beyond those traditionally responsible for “human rights” or other related reports and senior leadership?

Answer. State Department personnel receive instruction on key policy issues, including human rights, at every level of their careers, in courses ranging from new-hire orientation training to our most senior leadership training, including the Ambassadorial Seminar. In accordance with the International Religious Freedom Act (as amended), training on promoting and protecting International Religious Freedom is mandatory for all foreign service officers and specialists at all levels.

Question. How is the State Department working with civil society in states that are at-risk or experiencing atrocities? What does that partnership look like?

Answer. The Department works with civil society in atrocity risk-affected communities in myriad ways, including information sharing, building early warning and early response networks, providing psychosocial support, and training civil society on documenting atrocities. The Department develops and shares broader best practices around related concepts of transitional justice and peacebuilding, community building and social cohesion efforts, addressing historical grievances, empowering historically underrepresented individuals to participate in peace processes, empowering and protecting journalists, and supporting human rights defenders.

Question. How is the State Department supporting the work of the Ukraine Atrocities Advisory Group?

Answer. The State Department has joined together with the EU’s European External Action Service and the UK’s Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office to form the Atrocity Crimes Advisory Group for Ukraine (ACA). The State Department’s Office of Global Criminal Justice (GCJ) provided a \$10 million grant to Georgetown University, which serves as the lead coordinator for the ACA. GCJ hopes to provide an additional \$10 million grant to continue this initiative to support Ukraine’s Office of the Prosecutor General (OPG) by deploying experts and leading international prosecutors in the investigation and prosecution of atrocity crimes.

Question. What resources does the Ukraine Atrocities Advisory Group require to be most effective?

Answer. The United States, UK, and EU established the Atrocity Crimes Advisory Group for Ukraine (ACA) as a coordination mechanism to pool our collective re-

sources to assist Ukraine's War Crimes Units working under the Office of the Prosecutor General. Our EU and UK partners are invested in this initiative and ensuring the future success of the ACA. An ACA "Framework Arrangement" has now been signed between the United States, UK and EU partners that consolidates this united effort. We understand that securing accountability for atrocity crimes will take time and that we need to make a long-term investment in supporting the domestic authorities of Ukraine to do their work.

Question. What other atrocities documentation and evidence preservation efforts does the State Department plan to support in FY 2024?

Answer. Justice and accountability are central pillars of the U.S. response to Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, including through support for mechanisms designed to bring perpetrators of atrocities to justice. The FY 2024 budget request includes funding to continue efforts to document and raise awareness of atrocities, preserve potential evidence, identify suspects, and prepare war crimes cases for prosecution. This assistance will support Ukraine and the international community in holding accountable perpetrators of war crimes and crimes against humanity in Ukraine.

Question. Beyond Ukraine, what other geographic areas is the State Department focusing on to prevent and respond to atrocities?

Answer. The Department works globally to prevent and respond to atrocities, with atrocity prevention work happening in every region. This work utilizes all available tools to prevent, respond, and recover from atrocities, and includes work with a wide range of partners, both from governments and civil society.

Question. How do you plan to elevate atrocity prevention within the interagency and expedite the implementation of the Elie Wiesel Act and Atrocities Prevention Strategy?

Answer. The Atrocity Prevention Task Force continues to mainstream atrocity prevention into broader policy decision-making processes, by consistently looking to expand and improve outreach, and by ensuring the work of the task force is clearly articulated and the value of both the task force and the subsequent prevention and response work is front and center of public facing statements and interactions. This includes engaging with the interagency, bilateral, and multilateral partners, legislative colleagues, civil society, the think-tank community, and with academia on methods and opportunities for prevention.

Question. Genocide: Do you believe that the Russian Federation and its designees are actively or have been actively committing genocide against the people of Ukraine since February 2022? Why or why not?

Answer. We have been closely tracking the wide-ranging abuses and atrocities committed by Russia's forces since they first invaded Ukraine in 2014. Since 2022, we have assessed that Russia's forces have committed war crimes and members of Russia's forces and other Russian officials have committed crimes against humanity in Ukraine. These do not foreclose future determinations of other atrocity crimes. We continue to closely monitor, document, and analyze the situation and provide support to others to do the same. We are committed to accountability for Russia's heinous actions.

Question. Should the International Criminal Court issue other arrest warrants to hold Russia or other designees accountable for its crimes in Ukraine?

Answer. As President Biden said, the warrants of arrest that have been issued are justified. There is no doubt that Russia is committing war crimes and atrocities in Ukraine, and we have been clear that those responsible must be held accountable. The International Criminal Court prosecutor is an independent actor and makes his own prosecutorial decisions based on the evidence before him.

Question. At the March 22, 2023, hearing, you said that the Foreign Military Sales (FMS) system was the preferred way to help Taiwan strengthen its defenses rather than Foreign Military Financing (FMF) grants. What role do you see for Presidential Drawdown Authority (PDA) in providing rapid capability for Taiwan?

Answer. The Department recognizes that the drawdown authority is one of the USG's most valuable tools to quickly provide defense articles to foreign partners. As you know, there are numerous policy and national security implications the United States must consider before the President decides whether to authorize a drawdown. DoD, State, and interagency partners closely review all potential security cooperation tools, including the drawdown authorities and FMF, to decide the most appropriate mechanisms to support Taiwan.

Question. Will use of Presidential Drawdown Authority (PDA) diminish the importance of Foreign Military Financing (FMF) as the principal means of providing security assistance to foreign partners?

Answer. No, assistance to Ukraine through the military assistance drawdown authority can be a vital mechanism for providing arms quickly because the articles are coming from DoD stock. However, pulling from DoD stock is not a sustainable, global solution. FMF is more suitable for supporting enduring requirements and can be used to complement PDA in situations like the one in Ukraine.

Question. While you have a central role in the notification of Presidential Drawdown Authority (PDA) to Congress, these packages are developed at DoD without input from State. Does the use of PDA further erode State's lead role in the security assistance function?

Answer. No, the Department of State is involved throughout the drawdown process, including implementation. Under delegation from the President, the Secretary of State has directed each military assistance drawdown for Ukraine since September 2021.

Question. The Department's FY 2024 budget requests \$6.1 billion in FMF globally. This represents only a \$71,500 increase above the FY 2023 enacted FMF topline. Further, the East Asia and Pacific FMF topline of \$129 million remains the same as FY 2023 appropriations. How do you justify a flat FMF topline for the East Asia Pacific in light of, and by the Biden administration's own statements, the significant and growing threat China poses to the region?

Answer. The Department weighed its global priorities against budgetary constraints and political realities when requesting the \$6.1 billion in total FMF for FY 2024. The requested \$129 million in FMF for the East Asia and Pacific (EAP) region—and additional \$113 million request in FMF for emerging priorities that could potentially support the Indo-Pacific—balances requirements in EAP countries for FMF in recent years with emerging priorities for the region and partners' ability to finance their own defense needs without requiring additional funds from the U.S. taxpayer.

Question. Do you believe Taiwan is a priority security partner for the U.S. in the Indo-Pacific? If so, why does the FY 2024 budget request not include earmarked funds for Taiwan FMF?

Answer. We have been quite clear that our support to Taiwan is rock-solid. Taiwan has a high-income economy capable of supporting a multi-billion-dollar defense budget. The Department is seeking to address requirements in Taiwan through a range of available foreign policy tools, including our FY 2024 FMF request of \$113 million to address emerging priorities globally, which could include Taiwan.

Question. The Taiwan Enhanced Resilience Act (TERA), which was included in the FY 2024 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA), authorized up to \$2 billion annually in Foreign Military Financing (FMF) grants to Taiwan. Despite this new authority, and the Biden administration's support for TERA, the Department's FY 2024 budget request does not explicitly provide any FMF funding for Taiwan. Do you support full implementation of TERA, including FMF grants to Taiwan? If so, why is this support not reflected in the Department's FY 2024 budget request? If not, why not?

Answer. The Department appreciates the provisions in the TERA on FMF grant assistance to Taiwan, and we are exploring options for Taiwan. The FY 2024 budget includes a new FMF request of \$113 million to address emerging priorities globally, which could include Taiwan.

Question. The State Department's FY 2024 budget requests \$129 million in FMF for the East Asia and Pacific (EAP) region, \$50 million of which is for the "State East Asia and Pacific Regional" FMF line. Does the Department plan to allocate any of this \$50 million in EAP FMF to Taiwan?

Answer. Taiwan could be considered as a potential recipient for the requested \$50 million in EAP FMF. However, this would have to be balanced with the requirements other EAP partners.

Question. The Department's FY24 budget requests \$50 million in FMF for the "Countering People's Republic of China Influence Fund" (CPIF). Does the Department plan to allocate any of this \$50 million in CPIF FMF to Taiwan?

Answer. Taiwan may be considered for CPIF FMF funding. All CPIF proposals are evaluated against other global and emerging priorities as well as their potential to meaningfully counter malign PRC influence.

Question. The Department's FY 2024 budget requests \$113 million in FMF in a new "Emerging Global Priorities" line. Of that, the budget requests only \$16 million for Indo-Pacific partners, including potentially Taiwan. How much of this \$16 million in FMF does the Department plan to allocate to Taiwan?

Answer. By requesting FMF in this manner, the Department is seeking to retain the flexibility to address urgent and emergent requirements in the year of execution, of which Taiwan would almost certainly rank as a top priority. I hope Congress will support our request for this new global FMF line to target such critical gaps.

Question. Does the Department believe \$16 million or less in FMF to Taiwan is a serious or remotely credible deterrent against Chinese aggression?

Answer. FMF is not our only tool for deterrence in Taiwan or elsewhere. The Department is taking a range of actions across military, diplomatic, and economic realms to strengthen Taiwan's deterrence. We are reviewing all available authorities, including security assistance, to consider short- and long-term opportunities to bolster support for Taiwan and other critical partners in the region.

Question. *Foreign Military Sales:* Our Foreign Military Sales (FMS) system is currently facing significant case backlogs, long delivery leads, and slow processing times, leaving U.S. security partners with capability gaps and driving many of them to look elsewhere—in some cases, to our competitors—to fill their defense equipment needs. In order to ameliorate these and other problems in the FMS system, the Department of Defense (DoD) is undertaking a comprehensive study on its role in FMS and possible executive and legislative reforms to FMS more broadly. DoD and the State Department must work together in order to ensure FMS reforms are collaborative and appropriately address issues within the system. Are you committed to maintaining the State Department's leadership role in FMS as outlined in the Arms Export Control Act (AECA)?

Answer. Yes, consistent with section 2 of the Arms Export Control Act, the State Department remains committed to maintaining and exercising its statutory authorities with respect to the FMS program.

Question. What is the status of the Department's own review of FMS procedures?

Answer. The review is complete, and we expect to brief our committees of jurisdiction on our proposals in the near future.

Question. *AUKUS:* Does the Department already have the statutory authority it would need to implement changes to export control procedures (under ITAR and the AECA) in order to facilitate and operationalize the implementation of AUKUS? If so, has the Department used any of these authorities in relation to AUKUS? If not, why not?

Answer. I support facilitating secure defense trade with our allies to ensure we realize the goals of AUKUS. The Department is confident that current statutory authorities provide us the ability to develop new, cross-cutting export control tools tailored to allow sharing of our most sensitive technology for AUKUS programs. We are currently in discussions with the Department of Defense to implement such new tools and look forward to providing further details to Congress as the discussions progress.

Question. Has the Department provided Australia and the United Kingdom specific guidance or a list of tangible steps they need to take in order for their export control systems to be considered "comparable" by the State Department to that of the United States?

Answer. As allies, friends, and partners, we are working together to ensure our technology security frameworks are aligned and responsive to known threats, especially in relation to the sharing and co-developing of technology that provides critical military or intelligence advantages to the United States and our allies. The Department continues to engage with both Australia and the United Kingdom on tangible steps our countries should take to best facilitate secure defense trade between our nations.

Question. In what ways are the UK and Australian legal, regulatory and technology systems insufficient to grant them a 38J license exemption?

Answer. Among other requirements the Congress laid out in section 38(j) of the Arms Export Control Act, the Department notes that the UK and Australia's current controls on the export of tangible or intangible technology are not assessed to be comparable to those of the United States.

Question. Will the Department provide any 38J license exemption for Australia and the United Kingdom?

Answer. We are currently working with the Department of Defense to implement a new cross-cutting export control tool to allow our most sensitive technology to be exported expeditiously and securely for AUKUS programs. With this in mind, the Department continues to discuss the requirements outlined in Arms Export Control Act section 38(j) within the dedicated defense trade dialogues we hold with both Australia and the UK.

Question. AFRICA—U.S.-Africa Leaders' Summit: The Biden administration committed \$55 billion in investments in Africa over the next 3 years during the U.S.-Africa Leaders' Summit (ALS), "working closely with Congress". How is this \$55 billion investment reflected in the FY 2024 budget request?

Answer. The President announced \$55 billion for Africa at the second U.S.-Africa Leaders' Summit in December 2022. This funding level consisted of appropriated and requested funds from many U.S. Government agencies, including State and USAID, over three fiscal years (FY 2021 through FY 2023) for north and sub-Saharan Africa. The over \$8 billion in State and USAID foreign assistance included in the FY 2024 request is a historic high for the continent and is in addition to the \$55 billion announced at the Africa Leaders' Summit.

Question. I understand that the \$55 billion figure is largely made up of prior year funds. How will the Administration message to African governments, who have high hopes for a large influx of new U.S. investment, that this commitment is actually just a continuation of regular programming?

Answer. The \$55 billion announced for Africa at the 2022 U.S.-Africa Leaders' Summit is a continuation of long-standing U.S. leadership and commitment to African security, democracy, development, and economic growth. The United States is the largest single donor to Africa. The more than \$8 billion in foreign assistance for Africa in the President's FY 2024 budget request is a historically high level and underscores our intention to continue providing robust U.S. support for African partners.

Question. Despite repeated requests for Congress to be substantively engaged in ALS, including through my S.Res.538 which passed the Senate with unanimous consent on May 26, 2022, Congress was not meaningfully consulted or involved in ALS or the commitment of \$55 billion. How do you plan to remedy this?

Answer. The National Security Council engaged with Members of Congress leading up to the Africa Leaders' Summit and the Department notified close to \$9.8 billion in assistance supporting Sub-Saharan Africa included in the \$55 billion announcement. We will continue to stress the importance of stakeholder engagement and continue to notify Congress before releasing foreign assistance funds as required and leverage engagement mechanisms, such as pre-consults, to improve the quality of those interactions.

Question. The African Democratic and Political Transitions (ADAPT) was announced during the ALS, to "support emerging democratic governments and civil society at critical moments." What criteria will be used to determine "critical moments"?

Answer. The African Democratic and Political Transitions (ADAPT) initiative enables the U.S. Government to partner with regional bodies, governments, and civil society to support successful, stable, and sustainable democratic transitions. ADAPT will surge experts to the field to support transition tasks and fund programming such as national dialogues, census taking, voter registration, and constitutional reforms, among other potential activities. Benefiting countries will be identified based on political transitions on the continent.

Question. How will ADAPT be managed and implemented to ensure funds can be released quickly in order to enable a timely response to opportunities in critical moments?

Answer. The African Democratic and Political Transitions (ADAPT) initiative, totaling \$75 million over 3 years, is an interagency effort designed to enable the U.S. Government to expeditiously support democratic transitions. We will do so by quickly deploying experts during a transition and ensuring close coordination among key stakeholders across the interagency. These efforts will help ensure ADAPT resources are released quickly and utilized effectively and successfully.

Question. I understand that \$25 million of FY 2022 funds and \$25 million of FY 2023 funds will be combined with the \$25 million FY24 request to make up the initial \$75 million investment in ADAPT. Where was the \$50 million from FY 2022 and FY 2023 taken from to make it available for ADAPT?

Answer. The African Democratic and Political Transitions (ADAPT) program is a 3-year State and USAID initiative, announced at the 2022 U.S.-Africa Leaders' Summit, which will support democratic transitions and counter democratic backsliding in partnership with African regional bodies, governments, and civil society. The funding allocations for FY 2022 and FY 2023 are still being finalized, and additional funding will be sought from the FY 2024 and FY 2025 budgets, subject to the availability of funds.

Question. The FY 2024 request includes \$50 million for an initiative announced at ALS called Digital Transformation in Africa. This follows a FY23 \$20 million request for \$20 million for Digital Africa. Can you please provide more information on the new program Digital Transformation in Africa?

Answer. A signature initiative of the Biden-Harris administration, Digital Transformation with Africa (DTA) will expand digital access and literacy and strengthen digital enabling environments across the continent. DTA aims to facilitate over \$450 million in financing for Africa in line with the African Union's Digital Transformation Strategy and the U.S. Strategy Toward Sub-Saharan Africa. DTA will support increased economic opportunity and improved e-government service delivery by fostering an inclusive and resilient African digital ecosystem led by African communities and built on an open, interoperable, reliable, and secure internet.

Question. Ethiopia: On March 20, 2023, you made an atrocities determination for Ethiopia, finding that war crimes, crimes against humanity and ethnic cleansing were committed over the course of the conflict in Northern Ethiopia. I publicly called for accountability for atrocities committed in Ethiopia in April 2021, May 2021, June 2021, August 2021, September 2021, November 2021, December 2021, March 2022, June 2022, July 2022, August 2022, and November 2022, and introduced S.Res.97 (117th Congress) and was the lead-cosponsor on S.3199 (117th Congress) with Senator Menendez to call for and require accountability measures. Additionally, Senate Foreign Relations Committee and House Foreign Affairs Committee staff repeatedly raised the question of an atrocities determination for the conflict in Northern Ethiopia in regular calls with the State Department for over 2 years. Why was the atrocities determination for the conflict in Northern Ethiopia made after the cessation of hostilities in December 2022, and not used as an accountability tool as atrocities were being committed?

Answer. An atrocity determination is one tool among many to promote justice and prevent atrocities. I made the determination now based on review of the law and the facts and considering the situation in Ethiopia, including the status of diplomatic efforts to end fighting and facilitate peace negotiations. Throughout the conflict, we repeatedly condemned human rights abuses and violations, calling for investigation and accountability for those responsible. I have and will continue to stress that any lasting peace depends on accountability, including for those in positions of command.

Question. How is the atrocities designation balanced with State Department and USAID efforts to restore development assistance to Ethiopia and the increase in the budget request for FY 2024 over FY 2023?

Answer. An atrocity determination is a result of a careful review of the law and available facts. A determination, which acknowledges that atrocities were committed, is independent of the development assistance requirement to determine if there are ongoing gross violations of human rights by a government. Currently, we have assistance restrictions in place, and will re-evaluate based on the situation on the ground.

Question. Did the United States commit, along with the European Union, to the Government of Ethiopia that it would allow the mandate of the International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia (ICHREE) expire in October 2023?

Answer. Upon learning that the Government of Ethiopia was considering tabling a resolution to prematurely end the mandate of ICHREE, the United States, together with likeminded partners, immediately engaged senior Ethiopian officials in Addis Ababa, Washington, and Geneva and prevailed upon them to allow ICHREE to continue its work and complete its full mandate, ending in September 2023. We also conveyed our grave concerns over the significant institutional damage the precedent of early termination would cause. Whether the ICHREE mandate is further renewed will be subject to the decision of the UN Human Rights Council members, and the U.S. position will be based on the human rights situation on the ground.

Question. Last year, the ICHREE reported its finding that the Ethiopian Government committed crimes against humanity in its denial and obstruction of humanitarian assistance to Tigray, and the war crime of using starvation as a weapon of war. Did the State Department's review that led to the atrocities determination confirm that finding?

Answer. The determination was not intended to be an exhaustive accounting of all acts that constituted atrocity crimes over the course of the conflict. We may revise and expand our determination as warranted.

Given the allegations of many different specific war crimes in this armed conflict, we decided to address the category of war crimes collectively and not attempt to make public determinations as to each specific war crime. Our focus was on the final determination, which was that all parties to the conflict committed war crimes.

Question. Does the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) have full, unhindered access to the Tigray region, to include Western Tigray?

Answer. OHCHR has informed us it has access throughout Tigray, though it has not attempted to travel to Western Tigray in recent months due to security and resource constraints. USAID has provided \$1 million to OHCHR to cover the cost of four additional international monitors, which should be deployed within the next several weeks. Other international partners are funding additional monitors.

Question. As you know, conflict in Ethiopia is not limited to Tigray and surrounding areas. Tensions are high and conflict is brewing in multiple regions of Ethiopia, including in Oromia, the Somali Region, and Benishangul-Gumuz. How are U.S. resources, including those requested for FY 2024, being utilized to address widespread conflict in Ethiopia and to support the development of responsive, inclusive and representative democratic institutions?

Answer. We remain concerned about tensions and conflict in all parts of the country, in particular Oromia. The United States regularly calls upon the parties there to engage in political dialogue and exercise restraint. Through the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, we support programs aimed at conflict-mitigation and peacebuilding focusing on Amhara, Oromia, and Southern Nations, Nationalities, and People's Region. USAID Office of Transition Initiatives also supports peace and reconciliation processes with a current focus in Addis Ababa and the regional states of Oromia and Amhara.

Current assistance limitations prevent the United States from supporting certain programs to address the root causes of conflict, such as poverty and unemployment. USG funding that is not currently restricted is being used to improve the capacity of Ethiopian civil society to engage constructively in transitional justice and national dialogue processes.

Question. On March 22, 2023, two days following your announcement of the atrocities determination, the Ethiopian Ministry of Foreign Affairs detailed, on Twitter, a discussion between Minister of Foreign Affairs Mesganu Arga and U.S. Charge d'Affaires Tracy Jacobson, where Ambassador Jacobson reportedly said that the atrocities determination "will not have legal implication or any barrier on the bilateral relations of Ethiopia and the United States". Is this an accurate depiction of Ambassador Jacobson's comments during the meeting? If no, what was said during the meeting on the impact of the atrocities determination on U.S./Ethiopia bilateral relations? If yes, do you agree with this reported statement by Ambassador Jacobson?

Answer. As part of the atrocity determination notification process, the U.S. embassy, including the Chargé d'Affaires, engaged with the Government of Ethiopia at several levels to discuss the determination and next steps. In those meetings, Embassy officers explained why the United States was announcing the atrocity determination, indicated which institutions were found to have committed what atrocity crimes, and urged the Government of Ethiopia to pursue accountability and reconciliation through a comprehensive, credible, genuine, and inclusive transitional justice process.

While there generally are no legal consequences triggered by an atrocity determination in and of itself, the determination recognizes the severity of the crimes that were committed on all sides of this conflict. We have emphasized to the Government of Ethiopia at all levels that it is crucial to acknowledge these crimes in order to move forward, commit to truth-telling, and seek justice for victims. We have also noted that such a process is key to our bilateral relationship going forward.

Question. What implications does the atrocities determination have for the U.S./Ethiopia relationship?

Answer. This determination is about revealing the truth, acknowledging the suffering of victims and survivors, and pursuing justice and accountability. We have emphasized to the Ethiopian Government the importance of acknowledging the abuses that took place in the recent past and a comprehensive, credible, genuine, and inclusive transitional justice process, which will be key to our bilateral relationship going forward. The United States stands ready to support Ethiopians in a credible process to break the cycle of violence and forge a durable peace for the future.

Question. How does the atrocities designation affect Ethiopia's eligibility under the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) for 2024?

Answer. This determination is based on actions that occurred in connection with the conflict. It does not preclude Ethiopia from qualifying for AGOA privileges again, assuming the United States is able to confidently assess that the Government of Ethiopia is no longer engaged in gross violations of human rights.

To help make that assessment, we are pressing the Government of Ethiopia to continue allowing access for international human rights monitors.

Question. Horn of Africa: Now that the implementation of the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement for the war in northern Ethiopia is well underway, do you plan to expand the mandate of the Special Envoy for the Horn of Africa to cover additional issues in the Horn of Africa region, including but not limited to Somalia, conflicts in Ethiopia beyond Tigray and the surrounding areas, and the ongoing humanitarian crisis caused by acute food insecurity?

Answer. While there has been significant progress in implementing the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement on northern Ethiopia, the Special Envoy for the Horn of Africa (SEHOA) remains fully engaged to consolidate a lasting peace, including regarding human rights accountability and transitional justice. SEHOA also is fully engaged on forging a diplomatic resolution to issues related to the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam that would achieve the interests of all parties and contribute to a more peaceful and prosperous region. SEHOA contributes to other policy goals in the region as needed.

Question. Burundi: The State Department's 2022 Human Rights Report for Burundi detailed the significant human rights issues that persist in Burundi, including "extrajudicial killings; forced disappearance; torture and cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment by or on behalf of the government; harsh and life-threatening prison conditions, arbitrary arrest or detention; political prisoners or detainees; serious problems with the independence of the judiciary ... serious restrictions on freedom of expression and media, including violence or threats of violence against journalists and censorship; substantial interference with the freedom of peaceful assembly and freedom of association ... serious and unreasonable restrictions on political participation; serious government corruption; [and] serious government restrictions on or harassment of domestic and international human rights organizations." These findings are in stark contrast with U.S. efforts to reengage with the Government of Burundi after the death of President Nkurunziza in June 2020 and taking office of President Ndayishimiye. The FY 2024 request for Burundi is 10.4 percent higher than the FY23 request. How does the FY 2024 budget request address the human rights concerns raised in the 2022 Human Rights Report for Burundi?

Answer. The Department of State welcomes the improved relationship between the United States and Burundi, which we have used to engage on areas of concern for the U.S. Government, including human rights. The FY 2024 request continues support for programming to strengthen the capacity of civil society organizations to advocate for an improved human rights environment. We will also seek resources through centrally managed and regional accounts, as appropriate, to complement our existing bilateral programming.

Question. Given the poor human rights record detailed in the most recent Burundi Human Rights Report (2022), why was there no increase to the Democracy, Human Rights and Governance line item for Burundi (relative to the FY 2023 request) commiserate or in excess of the overall increase for Burundi?

Answer. Department of State officials, including Assistant Secretary of State Molly Phee and Ambassador Melanie Higgins, regularly raise human rights concerns with Burundian officials. The FY 2024 request increases democracy, human rights, and governance (DRG) funding to Sub-Saharan Africa by 53 percent over the FY 2023 request, including significant increases in regional and sub-regional operating units. Additional funding for regional sub-regional operating units will ensure our DRG resources are nimble and responsive to emerging or dire DRG needs, such as those in Burundi.

Question. What is the benefit to the United States in the Biden administration abandoning its “human rights first foreign policy” in Burundi in order to build a closer relationship to the Ndayishimiye government?

Answer. The Department of State continues to promote respect for human rights around the world, including in Burundi. Department officials regularly raise human rights concerns with Burundian officials, urging them to conduct complete and transparent investigations into alleged abuses, hold those responsible accountable, and cooperate with UN human rights mechanisms. The improved relationship between the United States and Burundi means such conversations are more constructive than in the past.

Question. Does the Biden administration plan to hold anyone accountable for the atrocities and human rights violations that have occurred under President Ndayishimiye?

Answer. In December 2022, the United States designated former Prime Minister Alain Guillaume Bunyoni under Section 7031(c) of the annual appropriations act for his involvement in a gross violation of human rights. In line with our global commitment to promote respect for human rights and accountability, the Department continues to proactively consider the use of all available tools to respond to any new or continuing human rights violations and abuses in Burundi.

Question. Africa Bureau Staffing: In responses to Questions for the Record as part of your confirmation process, you committed to working “with the White House and relevant State Department bureaus and offices to ensure that all posts in Sub-Saharan Africa are sufficiently and consistently staffed with the appropriate personnel.” I similarly asked you the following question for the record following the hearing on the FY23 State Department Budget Request: “Under your leadership, how has the Department budgeted for and taken steps to ensure that the Department ‘sufficiently and consistently’ staffs ‘all posts’ in the region?”

Answer. More than half of our historically difficult to staff (HDS) posts are in Africa. I remain deeply committed to resolving the challenge of filling positions in those posts. Insufficient infrastructure, inadequate schools, health care challenges, and the remote nature of many postings in Africa are inherent impediments to getting our posts to full staffing. In the last year the Department has reformed bidding incentives to better focus bidders’ attention on the most difficult to staff posts and continues to explore creative solutions for recruiting and retaining talent in these difficult locations.

Question. You responded: “Recruiting and assignments of Foreign Service (FS) officers are controlled by the Bureau of Global Talent Management (GTM). We expect to increase our FS hiring by at least 30 percent this fiscal year from the previous year, which will be the highest FS hiring in a decade. The Entry Level Division of GTM’s Career Development and Assignments Office works closely with the AF Bureau staff to ensure entry-level positions in AF are filled in a timely manner. Similarly, we strive to fill every available mid-level job in AF. However, the pool of potential candidates for AF service is diminished due to medical care and schooling concerns, particularly for parents of high schoolers or children with special needs. The Department continues to explore ways to remove such barriers to service. The majority of the vacancies in AF are at the FS-02 and FS-03 level, which reflects both the global shortage of FSOs due to reduced hiring and a Department-wide shortage of specialists in IT, facilities management, security, and office support.” The Africa Bureau remains chronically under-staffed, both in Washington, DC and in Embassies on the continent. What do you believe your record is, as Secretary, in addressing the acute staffing challenges faced by the Africa Bureau?

Answer. More than half of our historically difficult to staff (HDS) posts are in Africa. I remain deeply committed to resolving the challenge of filling positions in those posts. Insufficient infrastructure, inadequate schools, health care challenges, and the remote nature of many postings in Africa are inherent impediments to getting our posts to full staffing. In the last year the Department has reformed bidding incentives to better focus bidders’ attention on the most difficult to staff posts and continues to explore creative solutions for recruiting and retaining talent in these difficult locations.

Question. Under your leadership, how has the Department taken steps to ensure that the Department “sufficiently and consistently” staff “all posts” in Sub-Saharan Africa?

Answer. The Department continues to use increased incentives for service in historically difficult to staff posts around the world, including service needs differential for extended service, along with hardship differentials, and prioritized assignments.

Additionally, several initiatives are underway, including development of regional support models and use of a new assignments algorithm that matches bidders and bureaus based on mutual preferences. In the last year, the Department has reformed incentives to better focus bidders' attention on the most difficult to staff posts.

Question. What resources are included in the FY24 request to specifically address staffing challenges in the Africa Bureau?

Answer. The Department's FY 2024 request supports funding for 15 new U.S. Direct Hire (USDH) positions in the Bureau for African Affairs (AF), including 10 overseas program positions, three domestic program positions, and two public diplomacy positions.

Question. Has the Africa Bureau requested resources to address its acute staffing challenges that are not reflected in the FY 2024 budget request? If yes, what resources were requested?

Answer. As part of its effort to address the staffing challenges in Africa, the Bureau for African Affairs (AF) routinely works with the Bureau of Global Talent Management (GTM) to fill its entry-level positions. The FY 2024 request includes \$37 million for AF in operating and public diplomacy resources, including 15 new positions, to increase capacity for regional competition with the PRC and help manage complex embassies.

Question. Do you believe that the United States should put forward its most experienced and adaptable personnel in Africa to compete against China and Russia and to fulfill our policy objectives?

Answer. The Department always strives to place our most experienced and adaptable personnel in places where needs are most acute to advance U.S. interests, including in Africa.

Question. Thirty of the last 45 career Foreign Service nominees for ambassadorial posts in the Africa Bureau were to serve as first time ambassadors. While every ambassador has a first post somewhere, first time ambassadors have been nominated for positions in highly complex political and conflict environments that are stated national security priorities for the United States in Africa, including Ethiopia, Sudan, South Sudan, Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso. What will you do to ensure that experienced ambassadorial nominees are selected for high-profile and strategic U.S. missions in Sub-Saharan Africa?

Answer. The Department has a robust process for choosing chiefs of mission. I am committed to identifying highly qualified individuals for every one of these positions in the Bureau of African Affairs, particularly emphasizing those candidates with hardship and regional experience, as well as demonstrated leadership experience. In a number of cases, the best qualified individual has not yet been an ambassador.

Question. *Prosper Africa:* Prosper Africa brings together 17 U.S. Government departments and agencies to foster two-way trade and investment between the U.S. and Africa, with a secretariat led by USAID. The FY 2024 request includes \$100 million for Prosper Africa. This follows a \$100 million FY 2023 request, \$77 million FY 2022 request and a \$75 million FY 2021 request.

What are the concrete accomplishments of Prosper Africa to date?

Answer. With dedicated funding, Prosper Africa has established a deal facilitation platform where advisors have built a pipeline of nearly 500 deals valued at over \$25 billion. It has launched robust continental services, including networks of African suppliers and U.S. buyers, and a catalytic investment facility, which are expected to boost African exports and U.S. investment by \$2 billion in the next 5 years. It also helped mobilize \$1.5 billion of investment in climate, health, and sustainable infrastructure via new partnerships between the \$1 trillion U.S. pension community and African counterparts.

Question. What will an additional \$100 million investment help Prosper Africa accomplish?

Answer. Prosper Africa is redoubling its efforts by planning to invest \$171 million of FY 2021 to FY 2023 funding that will increase U.S. investment in Africa and African exports to the United States by \$2 billion in the next 5 years—a conservative estimate. The additional \$100 million in FY 2024 funds requested will enable Prosper Africa to dramatically increase the number of supported transactions, broaden its geographic coverage, bolster the activities and staff capacity of other U.S. Government agencies, and create more opportunities to leverage private capital. In

Kenya, \$5.3 million in Prosper Africa funds have leveraged more than \$265 million—a 50:1 return.

Question. Now 4 years into Prosper Africa, do you think the existing organizational structure is conducive to a whole-of-government approach to increasing trade and investment with Africa?

Answer. Prosper Africa advisors in Washington and across North and Sub-Saharan Africa are critical to advancing the initiative's mission. Advisors in Africa work with U.S. embassy colleagues while those in Washington, DC work with partner agencies across the U.S. Government; this coordinated approach enables the U.S. Government to respond more efficiently and effectively to private sector needs. The Secretariat supports hosting interagency detailees. Legislation codifying Prosper Africa's mission would further increase the initiative's effectiveness.

Question. Is USAID best suited to lead the secretariat given Prosper Africa's goals and objectives?

Answer. USAID's strong technical expertise in trade and investment, extensive field presence, and flexible cross-continental programs enable it to lead Prosper Africa. USAID has established the structures critical to the initiative's operations, including the Prosper Africa Secretariat, and a new program that offers a robust package of continent-wide services which are expected to boost U.S. investment and African exports by \$2 billion over the next 5 years.

Question. Do you believe that Chiefs of Mission are sufficiently empowered to drive trade and investment priorities in Africa?

Answer. Yes, our ambassadors are empowered to drive trade and investment priorities in Africa, as is evidenced by their strong track record advocating for U.S. firms with their host governments. Several State Department bureaus offer programmatic resources for embassy deal teams. Some of these resources include the Commerce-State Partner Post Program, Direct Line, Business Facilitation Incentive Fund (BFIF), the Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment (PGII), and the Minerals Security Partnership.

Question. Somalia: The largest request for Democracy, Human Rights and Governance funding in Sub-Saharan Africa for FY 2024 is for Somalia (\$33 million), a 73.7 percent increase over the FY 2023 request. The security environment in Somalia, lack of political will for democratic reforms, an inability to hold one-person-one-vote elections for 50 years (due to the security situation and lack of political will) and limited freedom of movement of Somali and implementing partners makes democracy, human rights and governance programs difficult to implement and expensive.

Answer. Yes, the State Department is committed to advocating strongly for democratic reforms in Somalia, including human rights and good governance, which we view as inextricably linked to our overall goal of advancing peace and stability in the country.

Question. Somalia: Does this prioritization of Somalia for democracy, human rights, and governance resources in the budget reflect the Department's diplomatic commitment to pursuing democratic reforms in Somalia?

Answer. Yes, the State Department is committed to advocating strongly for democratic reforms in Somalia, including human rights and good governance, which we view as inextricably linked to our overall goal of advancing peace and stability in the country.

Question. Will the Department commit to matching its planned funding of these Democracy, Human Rights and Governance programs with commensurate diplomatic and other approaches to hold the Somali Government accountable to their commitments and to ensure that U.S. funding for universal suffrage in Somalia is not met with another disappointing indirect selection process?

Answer. The State Department is committed to advocating diplomatically for Somalia to hold inclusive, transparent, and democratic elections at all levels of government. We are encouraging the Federal Government of Somalia to begin the political, technical, and legal preparations for the 2026 election cycle as soon as possible to avoid the potential for another flawed indirect selection process. We also are urging it to adopt a realistic timeline for holding universal suffrage elections at the national level.

Question. What adjustments in strategy, as compared to the strategy pursued from 2017–2022, will the Department pursue to ensure that investments of significant democracy, human rights and governance funds in Somalia achieve results.

Answer. We are advocating for the Federal Government of Somalia to advance technical reforms and develop governance institutions at the same time it builds political consensus on elections, the constitution, and other federal agreements. We have also broadened engagement and outreach to international actors to ensure a more unified approach to supporting political reconciliation and reform. Diverging approaches by external actors was a significant impediment to progress from 2017 to 2022.

Question. Where does Somalia rank on the State Department's list of priorities for Africa?

Answer. Advancing peace and stability in Somalia is among the State Department's top Africa priorities, given the threat that Al-Shabaab and other terrorists in Somalia pose to U.S. citizens and interests in the region. Continued instability in Somalia also threatens broader U.S. interests and impedes economic growth and development.

Question. Nigeria: The FY 2024 request for Democracy, Human Rights, and Governance funding for Nigeria (\$25.5 million) is a 56.4 percent increase over the FY 2023 request. At the same time, the Peace and Security budget request for Nigeria decreased by 17.3 percent. Does the Department regard support to election in Nigeria as a cyclical or continuous need?

Answer. Our elections assistance is designed to build systems and processes over the long term so that electoral outcomes are viewed as free and fair, to educate the public on their civic rights to vote, to give voice to the youth, and to help all Nigerians see a future running for office. These results are ultimately designed to increase electoral participation and to see an improvement from the poor 27 percent turnout of the most recent presidential election. This work requires continuous engagement in order to achieve results and, therefore, the Department regards this funding as a continuous need.

Question. What is the rationale for such a significant increase in the Democracy, Human Rights and Governance budget for Nigeria, given that national elections (approaching elections are typically the rationale for an increased budget) were just held in the last 2 weeks?

Answer. This increase reflects a broader request across missions in Africa for increased funding. For Nigeria in particular, it is worth noting that FY 2024 funds would support activities taking place in 2025, 2 years before Nigeria's 2027 national elections. That said, election support is one component of a diverse Democracy, Human Rights, and Governance (DRG) portfolio in Nigeria. DRG activities also enhance civic voices and accountability, increase accountability and effectiveness of public institutions, and help prevent conflict.

Question. Given the significant and myriad security challenges facing Nigeria, ranging from an intractable violent extremist insurgency, widespread banditry, farmer/herder conflict and revival of separatist movements, please explain the reduction in budget for Peace and Security initiatives in Nigeria.

Answer. Peace and security assistance to Nigeria includes activities funded within the following accounts: Development Assistance, International Military Education and Training (IMET) and International Narcotics and Law Enforcement (INCLE). While IMET and INCLE funding has remained relatively straight-lined over the past several fiscal years, there is a slight reduction to DA-funded peace and security assistance in the FY 2024 request given the need to make tradeoffs for other critical programming priorities such as robust increase for democracy, human rights and governance assistance.

Question. The 2023 national (February 25) and state-level (March 18) elections in Nigeria were widely viewed as flawed by international observers, Nigerian candidates and political parties, and the Nigerian public. Despite this, on March 1—the same day as the election commission announced presidential results—the State Department congratulated the president-elect and the Nigerian people on the conduct and result of the February 25 election, noting it ushered in a “new period for Nigerian politics and democracy.” Given how the electoral process has continued to play out since the March 1 announcement of results, including with the March 18 state-level elections, do you think the State Department's March 1 congratulatory remarks and tone were premature?

Answer. Our decision to offer congratulations was made after careful analysis of the official results announced by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) and the results of the parallel vote tabulation process, which largely corroborated that announcement. INEC is constitutionally empowered to announce election

results and recognizing its announcement of Tinubu as the winner was consistent with our support for Nigeria's constitutional democracy. We have been very clear, however, about our concerns regarding the process, particularly the logistical shortcomings that contributed to the disappointingly low turnout percentage. We recognize that INEC must continue to improve, and that we must play our part in fostering a more effective electoral process.

Question. Do you think the State Department's position on the 2023 electoral process has caused the U.S. to lose credibility with the Nigerian people?

Answer. Our position has been consistent throughout this election season: we support a peaceful, credible, and transparent electoral process. Even as we congratulated the president-elect as the announced winner, we expressed our concerns about the failures of the Independent National Electoral Commission and emphasized to candidates and parties that any disputes must be resolved peacefully in the courts. Our diplomats in Nigeria routinely engage with a wide variety of civil society actors, and I am confident that our messaging continues to resonate with the Nigerian people.

Question. The Senate Foreign Relations Committee has, in a bi-partisan manner, been critical of proposed arms sales to Nigeria due to the abysmal human rights record of the Nigerian military. Most recently, a shocking December 2022 Reuters investigative piece reports on a secret mass abortion (at least 10,000) program and child killings carried out by the Nigerian military in its war against Boko Haram. Nigerian solutions, including the investigation by the Nigerian Human Rights Commission, are important to investigating these reports. However, the use of taxpayer dollars to support development and security efforts in Nigeria, coupled with a global commitment to protecting internationally recognized human rights, necessitates that the U.S. engage in serious independent efforts to investigate and respond to allegations of this nature. What is the State Department doing to verify the Reuters report and engage with the Nigerian Government on human rights concerns related to the Nigerian military?

Answer. I, too, was shocked and dismayed to read about the allegations and we have taken them very seriously. Our diplomats in Abuja and senior officials in Washington have spoken directly with Nigerian officials at the highest levels to strongly emphasize the need for a thorough and transparent investigation. As a result of our efforts, the Nigerian National Human Rights Commission is conducting an investigation with the results expected later this summer. We will continue to monitor the progress of this investigation and urge that it be done in a transparent manner while protecting any individuals who may be interviewed, or who may come forward with information, about the accusations.

Question. South Sudan: While a reduction in the budget request for South Sudan is appropriate given the general failure of the parties in South Sudan to make good on their commitments outlined in the Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in South Sudan (R-ARCSS), the dire humanitarian situation faced by the South Sudanese people, and the continuation of localized proxy conflicts, it is curious that the line items for Conflict Mitigation and Stabilization, and Democracy, Human Rights, and Governance were reduced. What is the State Department, alongside USAID, trying to achieve in South Sudan?

Answer. Our goal is to support the South Sudanese people's demands for an inclusive transition to democracy and a peaceful, stable future. We continue to work to mitigate and prevent sub-national violence; protect human rights; better target U.S. assistance to communities in need; protect and defend civic space for civil society, independent media, and peaceful political voices; and hold the transitional government accountable to its commitments. The lower level of assistance signals our concerns with the lack of sustained progress by South Sudan's leaders.

Question. How does this budget request reflect those goals?

Answer. The request for a lower level of assistance signals our concerns with the lack of sustained progress by South Sudan's leaders in preventing subnational violence, protecting human rights, tackling corruption, facilitating humanitarian access, and assuming a greater responsibility for service delivery. Despite budget reductions, funding for critical agriculture, education, health, democracy, and humanitarian assistance continues. I continue to press for peace and accountability for human rights abuses through targeted sanctions under E.O. 13664 and 13818.

Question. Will the Department conduct a review of foreign assistance to South Sudan this fiscal year to ensure that U.S. assistance adheres to the principal of "do no harm"?

Answer. The Department and USAID routinely monitor and review all U.S. assistance flows to South Sudan to ensure alignment with “do no harm principles,” program goals, and proper stewardship of U.S. taxpayer dollars. To enhance these efforts this fiscal year, USAID is finalizing a program to fund a risk management officer within the UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS). The officer would support UNMISS’s efforts to better organize the international community to address continuing challenges with assistance diversion, threats, and taxation in South Sudan.

Question. Why has the Department chosen not to put the support we know will be needed for Ukraine in FY 2024 into the budget proposal you submitted to Congress?

Answer. The FY 2024 budget request for Ukraine of \$753.2 million builds on critical work we initiated with the supplemental appropriations. It also takes into consideration that State and USAID are currently working to allocate more than \$16.5 billion made available in the fourth Ukraine supplemental. Given the fluidity of the situation, we will continue to assess requirements and available resources to meet those needs.

Question. There is less than \$4 billion remaining in the Presidential Drawdown Account for FY 2023. There are over 6 months remaining in the fiscal year. Given PDA burn rates over the past year, it seems clear that the PDA account will run dry long before the end of FY 2023. Does the Administration intend to submit a Ukraine Supplemental Request in the coming weeks or months?

Answer. We appreciate the Ukraine supplemental appropriations Congress provided for Ukraine, including through the Ukraine Security Assistance Initiative and Foreign Military Financing, as well as the increased authority for drawdowns under section 506(a)(1) and section 552(c)(2) of the Foreign Assistance Act. The Administration has not made a determination regarding a supplemental request for Ukraine for FY 2023, however, we continue to assess the requirements as well as available resources to support Ukraine.

Question. Does the Administration intend to continue depending on supplemental budget requests to Congress to keep funding our military, economic, and humanitarian support for Ukraine?

Answer. We appreciate the significant supplemental appropriations Congress provided to support the U.S. response to Russia’s full-scale war against Ukraine. We will utilize all available funding to address the highest needs and continue to work with other donors to leverage additional support to help meet Ukraine’s needs, including its security, humanitarian, and economic assistance needs. Given the fluidity of the situation on the ground, we will continue to assess requirements and available resources to meet those needs.

Question. Rebuilding Ukraine is a project that must begin now, even before the fighting stops. What role do you believe the United States should play in rebuilding Ukraine?

Answer. Ukraine will lead its recovery, but the United States must play a crucial role in supporting these efforts. Diplomatically, we will continue to engage with Allies and partners, including in the G7, on supporting Ukraine’s recovery. We will continue to support engagement by multilateral development banks, and we will continue to engage with the private sector on opportunities to help Ukraine rebuild and modernize. We will use the assistance resources provided to us by Congress to contribute to this historic effort to help Ukraine and its people recover from Russia’s war and continue their European path.

Question. What role does the U.S. expect the European Union to play in the reconstruction of Ukraine?

Answer. We will continue to partner with the European Union (EU) in supporting Ukraine’s recovery and reconstruction. The EU has made substantial commitments of economic support, including €18 billion for budget support through 2023. We anticipate that EU engagement will deepen as Ukraine continues its path to EU membership, particularly on supporting the Government of Ukraine’s efforts to enact reforms, ensure macro-financial stability, and repair or modernize its infrastructure. We will coordinate closely with the EU, including through a G7 multi-donor coordination platform, to ensure that we advance our mutual goals.

Question. When the reconstruction of Ukraine begins in earnest, how does the State Department expect to financially contribute?

Answer. We are still in the process of evaluating potential reconstruction needs given the fluidity of the situation on the ground. The U.S. effort will include work-

ing with Ukraine and other donors to develop a comprehensive framework of reconstruction and reform requirements and resourcing needs. The United States will continue to stand with Ukraine, work with allies to burden share in reconstruction efforts, and use resources responsibly to advance U.S. foreign policy goals.

Question. Do you anticipate the need for supplemental budget requests to fund reconstruction of Ukraine?

Answer. We continue to work within the interagency and with the Government of Ukraine and other donors to assess funding needs for Ukraine's recovery and reconstruction. Given the fluidity of the situation on the ground, we continuously assess requirements and available resources to meet those needs, to include burden sharing with allies. The President would determine if another supplemental budget request is needed in order to continue supporting Ukraine in defending and rebuilding its country.

Question. Does the Administration support the concept of confiscating or repurposing frozen Russian sovereign assets, in coordination with an international coalition, in order to support Ukraine?

Answer. The Administration supports exploring all legally available options, in coordination with Allies and partners, that would ensure that Russia pays for the damage it has caused, including to Ukraine's critical infrastructure. With our G7 partners, we stated our determination, consistent with our respective legal systems, that Russia's sovereign assets in our jurisdictions will remain immobilized until there is a resolution to the conflict that addresses Russia's violation of Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity.

Question. Has the Government of Ukraine ever conveyed support for using frozen Russian sovereign funds to support in meetings with U.S. officials?

Answer. The Government of Ukraine has conveyed its support publicly and in meetings with U.S. officials for careful consideration of all options that would ensure that Russia pays for the damage it has caused to Ukraine, including using frozen Russian sovereign funds to rebuild Ukraine.

Question. Have any other Allies or partners expressed interest in using frozen Russian sovereign assets in order to support Ukraine?

Answer. Along with our G7 partners and consistent with our respective legal systems, we stated our determination that Russia's sovereign assets in our jurisdictions will remain immobilized until there is a resolution to the conflict that addresses Russia's violation of Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity. Together with our Allies and partners, we are exploring legally available options for using frozen Russian sovereign assets to help pay for Ukraine's long-term reconstruction.

Question. Has the Department conveyed any opinion or position on using frozen Russian sovereign assets in order to support Ukraine?

Answer. We have stated our determination, with G7 partners, that Russian sovereign assets will remain immobilized until there is a resolution to the conflict that addresses Russia's violation of Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity. Any resolution to the conflict must ensure Russia pays for the damage it has caused.

Question. Does the Executive Branch currently possess the authorities to confiscate or redirect frozen sovereign assets to Ukraine? If so, what are those authorities?

Answer. The Executive Branch possesses a number of tools to support Ukraine and hold Russia to account, including section 1708 of the Additional Ukraine Supplemental Appropriations Act, 2023 (Div. M, P.L. 117-328), which provides for the Department of Justice to transfer certain forfeited Russian assets to the Department of State for use in Ukraine, our general asset forfeiture authorities, and our broad array of sanctions authorities. We value the tools that Congress has provided us, and we are considering all available options to make the most effective use of these tools.

Question. Would a permissive authority allowing the USG to confiscate Russian sovereign assets and direct them to Ukraine increase or decrease U.S. leverage over Russia?

Answer. The Executive Branch possesses a number of tools to support Ukraine and hold Russia to account, including section 1708 of the Additional Ukraine Supplemental Appropriations Act, 2023 (Div. M, P.L. 117-328), which provides for the Department of Justice to transfer certain forfeited Russian assets to the Department of State for use in Ukraine, our general asset forfeiture authorities, and our broad array of sanctions authorities. We value the tools that Congress has provided us and

we are considering all available options to make the most effective use of these tools.

Question. Embassy Issues in Europe: For the last few years, two of the U.S.-sponsored Voluntary National Contribution positions at NATO have been given to U.S. foreign service officers who are China experts. The U.S. has purposefully made the decision to devote these two positions to China-watchers with the goal of raising NATO's level of knowledge about China. We now understand that despite the acute need for a better understanding of China in NATO, and NATO's recent move to spend more time and energy on confronting the China question, the State Department has made the decision that these two positions will no longer be filled by China hands. Why was this decision made?

Answer. The Department is working to identify resources to renew these two Voluntary National Contribution (VNC) positions on NATO international staff since they were previously established with temporary resources.

Question. Does the State Department believe that this staffing decision is in line with the National Security Strategy's stated goal "to align our efforts [on China] with our network of allies and partners, acting with common purpose and in common cause"?

Answer. The Department is working to identify resources to renew these two Voluntary National Contribution (VNC) positions on NATO international staff since they were previously established with temporary resources.

Question. Over the past several years, the U.S. Embassy in Moscow has had its staff severely reduced by actions taken by the Russian Government. Please provide an update on the staffing situation, including the Russian Federation's provision of diplomatic visas for U.S. foreign service officers, at Embassy Moscow.

Answer. The embassy continues to face staffing and other challenges as the result of Russian actions, including the ongoing impasse with the Russians on diplomatic visas.

Together with the embassy team and Washington, I am committed to strengthening our mission's operations, and, where possible, engaging with the Russian Government to seek practical solutions to enable the mission to continue its important diplomatic work.

Question. Please provide an update on the staffing situation at the Russian Federation's Embassy in the United States, including consulates.

Answer. The Russian Federation maintains a diplomatic presence at its embassy in Washington, DC and two consulates in New York City and Houston. The Russian Federation also maintains a presence at its UN Mission in New York City.

Question. Has the Russian embassy's staffing in the United States now been reduced to match the low level of staffing at the U.S. Embassy in Moscow?

Answer. The U.S. Embassy in Moscow remains understaffed, as a result of actions taken by the Russian Government. We continue to engage the Russian Government over diplomatic visas to address our staffing needs. We remain focused on a better balance in our respective staffing postures.

Question. INDO-PACIFIC—Mission China: Your FY 2024 budget requests asks for an increase of 69 locally employed staff for our Mission in China. What is the rationale behind these increases?

Answer. The FY 2024 Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs (EAP) request includes \$2.3 million for an additional 69 locally employed staff in the Indo-Pacific region to align support staff with the growing numbers of new initiatives and U.S. direct hire positions. Of the 69 positions, 11 would be allocated to Mission China to support management functions in Beijing, Guangzhou, and Wuhan. The FY 2024 budget rollout slide deck incorrectly asserts that all positions support Mission China operations—this was a technical error. Additional detail related to this request will be included in EAP chapter of the FY 2024 CBJ A-1.

Question. Is it to fill staffing gaps caused by curtailments of Direct Hires during COVID, or challenges recruiting Direct Hires to go to China?

Answer. Neither. This was in error. The FY 2024 budget rollout slide deck incorrectly asserts that all 69 locally employed staff positions support Mission China operations. The FY 2024 Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs (EAP) request includes \$2.3 million for an additional 69 locally employed staff in the Indo-Pacific region to align support staff with the growing numbers of new initiatives and USDH positions. Of the 69 positions, 11 would be allocated to Mission China to support

management functions in Beijing, Guangzhou, and Wuhan. Additional detail will be included in the EAP chapter of the FY 2024 CBJ A-1.

Question. How is the Department vetting these individuals?

Answer. Like all U.S. missions abroad, Mission China may appoint locally employed staff (LE staff) only after completion of a thorough background investigation (to include collaboration with the host government, as appropriate) and security certification process. Each case is reviewed by a regional security officer for issuance of a final security certification. LE staff members are reinvestigated on a regular, recurring basis to maintain their security certification.

Question. What safeguards are you taking with respect to counterintelligence concerns, including LE Staff who may be forced or pressured by the PRC Government to do things they do not want to do?

Answer. The Bureau of Diplomatic Security (DS), Office of Counterintelligence (DS/CI) created a dedicated counterintelligence (CI) unit within Embassy Beijing's Regional Security Office (RSO). DS/CI and the Beijing CI unit are responsible for measures against CI threats from foreign intelligence services targeting Mission China personnel, information, and facilities. They are supported by Washington-based investigative, analytical, and program staff. Mission China issued guidance to LE Staff on what to do if approached by PRC security officials, instructing them to report interactions to the RSO.

Question. China/Indo-Pacific: The Department has asked for \$2 billion in mandatory spending for the Indo-Pacific region and \$2 billion for hard infrastructure, but did not propose offsets. Do you support cutting funding from somewhere else—including domestic spending—to ensure that these foreign policy priorities are funded properly?

Answer. The Department continues to stand by all elements included in the FY 2024 President's budget request, both on the mandatory and discretionary sides. It is critical that these foreign assistance investments are made in order to for us to effectively compete with the PRC globally. We are not providing specific offsets attached to this proposal, as the Administration has proposed offsets as a whole across the FY 2024 President's budget.

Question. Please provide at least 5 examples of projects or initiatives you would like to support through this \$2 billion in mandatory funding.

Answer. Funding will support competitive connectivity in the Indo-Pacific, making economies more connected and resilient through transformative investments in emerging technologies, supply chains, and transportation. Programs will advance a robust regional approach to secure Open Radio Access Network (ORAN) digital technology and other secure, high-standard technologies that provide like-minded alternatives to the PRC's predatory and coercive economic practices. Funding will also enable the United States to coordinate strategic investments with likeminded partners and incentivize lasting commitments from host governments that advance longer-term, deeper cooperation in countries most at risk of coercion and predatory influence.

Question. Your proposal includes \$2 billion in a new revolving fund for Development Finance Corporation (DFC) equity investments. There is bipartisan support for using the DFC to advance a credible U.S. economic policy and counter bad investments by China. Unfortunately, the Biden administration has turned it into an organization to advance progressive policy priorities like climate and gender—including a mandate that the DFC cannot work on natural gas projects, causing many U.S. partners to turn to dirty coal from China. What reason do we have to believe that the Administration will not use this new "revolving fund" towards the same ends?

Answer. Being able to make equity investments helps DFC offer an attractive and viable alternative to potential partners in markets where the PRC is often active. The proposed revolving equity fund would enable DFC to reinvest returns from its initial investments to provide the higher value investments that host countries would prefer, an important tool in our strategy to outcompete the PRC. DFC would use these resources to support critical private sector projects consistent with applicable investment policies, and natural gas projects would not be categorically excluded from receiving support.

Question. Infrastructure/PGII: The Department is seeking \$2 billion in mandatory funds for "hard" infrastructure and another \$250 million in discretionary funds, which would go to Project for Infrastructure and Investment (PGII) projects on climate and gender equity. Do you support cutting domestic spending to offset the

costs of this line item and to ensure this national security priority is actually funded?

Answer. The Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment (PGII) was launched by the G7 to offer a credible alternative for financing of high-quality infrastructure in emerging markets. These investments across discretionary and mandatory funding will allow us to advance strategic, capital-intensive, and multi-year hard infrastructure projects necessary to effectively outcompete China. We are not providing specific offsets attached to this proposal as the Administration has proposed offsets as a whole across the FY 2024 President's budget.

Question. If the mandatory funding does not materialize, will you prioritize "hard" infrastructure over climate and gender projects to advance competition with China?

Answer. The foreign assistance levels in the FY 2024 President's budget request will be critical for us to effectively compete with the PRC. We cannot succeed by taking a piecemeal approach. The requested \$2 billion in mandatory funding is necessary to advance strategic, capital-intensive, multi-year infrastructure projects—such as undersea fiberoptic cables and 5G networks—that would otherwise be lost to geostrategic competitors. Project for Infrastructure and Investment (PGII) resources are needed to further level the playing field in digital connectivity and security, climate, clean energy supply chains, and energy security sectors.

Question. Will you state publicly that the purpose of PGII is focus on hard infrastructure? I have been told privately in writing that this is the case, and members of the State Department have also stated this on briefing calls with SFRC staff. However, the Administration continues to emphasize the prioritization of climate, gender, etc. in its public messaging.

Answer. Fundamentally, PGII aims to support the infrastructure investments our partners are seeking. While some of this funding may be used for projects that have co-benefits to our energy security work and advance gender equity goals, the majority would be used for a variety of strategic infrastructure projects including trusted information and communications technology networks, connective transportation corridors and hubs, as well as agriculture-related infrastructure and health systems.

Question. Please provide at least 5 examples of projects or initiatives you would like to support through this \$2 billion in mandatory funding.

Answer. Mandatory infrastructure funding will focus on advancing specific hard infrastructure projects that are highly strategic, including fiberoptic cables and 5G networks with trusted vendors; ports and railroads connecting critical minerals to Western markets; and vaccine manufacturing. For example, we are looking to build out the Lobito Corridor—a rail linkage that would be the only non-PRC infrastructure connecting the Democratic Republic of the Congo's copper and cobalt belt with global markets through Angola. PGII is seeking to layer additional investments in digital, energy, agribusiness, and other areas to maximize the economic and development impacts for both the U.S. and the local partners.

Question. *MIDDLE EAST—Strategic Competition:* Our longstanding Middle East partners are increasingly seeking to diversify their defense and diplomatic relationships in a manner that is often inconsistent with U.S. national security objectives. These partners point to Biden administration Iran policies, overly restrictive arms sales, the pivot to the Asia Pacific, the Afghanistan withdrawal, and a lukewarm embrace of the Abraham Accords as evidence of a U.S. retreat from the region and a reason to diversify relationships with Russia and China. How do you address these concerns and ensure the primacy of the United States as the partner of choice in the Middle East?

Answer. Our affirmative agenda of regional engagement is anchored by work with partners to mitigate food insecurity, address climate change, enhance maritime security, and cooperatively bolster air and missile defense. We also working vigorously to advance regional integration through the Negev Forum and to broaden, deepen, and expand the Abraham Accords. We continue to advance robust, purposeful defense cooperation with our partners to meet their security requirements. Our partners strongly prefer U.S. military equipment while PRC sales to the region remain comparatively modest.

Question. Should Russia and China establish dominance in the Middle East, what are the implications for U.S. interests?

Answer. Neither Russia nor China is displacing the United States as the partner of choice across the Middle East. Russia and the PRC continue to support malign state and non-state actors that fuel unrest throughout the region. They shield Tehran from accountability for its support for the Houthis, and Russia's Wagner

mercenaries are responsible for atrocities in Syria and Libya that have fed instability more widely in Africa. De-escalation and diplomacy together with deterrence have been at the core of the Biden administration's approach to the Middle East.

Question. Should Russia and China establish dominance in the Middle East, what are the implications for global energy commons?

Answer. The Middle East's energy industry is dominated by national oil companies that operate largely independently of foreign powers. While some are seeking to expand relationships with China, Middle Eastern countries maintain long-standing ties with U.S. companies and look to U.S. and other western companies for innovative technologies. The United States remains the top global producer and a key exporter of oil, gas, and energy technologies, and is contributing to ensuring global energy markets are stable.

Question. Should Russia and China establish dominance in the Middle East, what are the implications for the generational struggle against terrorism?

Answer. Neither Russia nor China is displacing the United States as the partner of choice across the Middle East. The United States remains committed to working with our allies and partners to reduce tensions and build governing and security structures strong enough to withstand and combat the spread of terrorism in the Middle East. Russia is focused on its war of aggression against Ukraine and the PRC has yet to show the willingness to constructively combat the threat of terrorism. At the same time, both Russia and the PRC are strengthening their ties to Iran, the single-most destabilizing force in the region and largest sponsor of global terrorism.

Question. Should Russia and China establish dominance in the Middle East, what are the implications for human rights?

Answer. Neither Russia nor China is displacing the United States as the partner of choice across the Middle East, and both work at cross-purposes to our own efforts to address human rights concerns. This includes the genocide and crimes against humanity in Xinjiang and refolement of Uyghurs to the PRC. Russia's support for Syria and Iran contributes to regime violence against their own citizens, and against civilians in Yemen through Tehran's support for the Houthis. Russia's Wagner mercenaries are responsible for atrocities in Syria and Libya and have fed instability more widely in Africa.

Question. Iran: On February 20, 2023, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) announced Iran has developed uranium enriched to 84 percent, just short of weapon-grade uranium. Does the Administration continue to maintain a policy to ensure Iran will never acquire or develop nuclear weapons?

Answer. Yes, President Biden is absolutely committed to ensuring Iran never acquires a nuclear weapon.

Question. If Iran crosses the 90 percent threshold of uranium enrichment, how is the Administration prepared to respond?

Answer. We remain absolutely committed to ensuring Iran never acquires a nuclear weapon. We are preparing for all possible contingencies, including the possibility Iran will cross the 90 percent threshold, in full coordination with Israel and our other partners and allies.

Question. If Iran crosses the 90 percent threshold of uranium enrichment, is the Administration prepared to respond militarily?

Answer. The President is absolutely committed to ensuring that Iran never acquires a nuclear weapon, and we believe diplomacy is the best way to accomplish this goal. President Biden has been clear that we have not removed any option from the table.

Question. What discussions has the Biden administration had with the Israelis on what Iranian nuclear non-compliance would merit a military response? If we haven't had these discussions, why not?

Answer. There is no greater supporter of Israel's security than President Biden. We are preparing for all possible contingencies in full coordination with our partners and allies, including Israel.

Question. What support is the United States prepared to provide to Israel in the event of a military response to Iranian nuclear non-compliance?

Answer. There is no greater supporter of Israel's security than President Biden, and he is absolutely committed to ensuring Iran never acquires a nuclear weapon.

We are preparing for all possible contingencies in full coordination with our partners and allies, including Israel.

Question. What discussions has the United States had with the other signatories of the JCPOA, particularly the E3, on what Iranian nuclear non-compliance would trigger snapback at the UN under UNSCR 2231? If we haven't had these discussions, why not?

Answer. We remain greatly concerned by Iran's continued expansion of its nuclear activities and are in close contact with our allies and partners, including the E3, on these and related matters, including the snapback mechanism under UNSCR 2231. We will continue to vigorously implement and enforce U.S. sanctions and the provisions of UNSCR 2231, in close coordination with our European allies.

Question. The growing alignment between Iran, Russia, and China raises concerns for regional deterrence and global strategic competition. What specific steps is the Administration taking to drive a wedge between Russia and Iran and discourage continued cooperation?

Answer. Iran and Russia's deepening security partnership continues to be a grave concern. This partnership poses a threat not just to Ukraine, but to Iran's neighbors in the region. We have shared this information with partners in the Middle East and around the world.

We continue to counter, expose, and disrupt this defense cooperation, including through the imposition and enforcement of sanctions as well as export controls and by monitoring Iran's material support for Russia. We remain very focused on this issue.

Question. How is the Administration investigating export control gaps for Iranian drones used in Ukraine, which reportedly have key parts developed by American companies?

Answer. The Administration has undertaken a broad interagency process to ensure we can counter, expose, and disrupt Iran's transfer of drones to Russia for use against Ukraine and will continue to take steps necessary to fill any gaps. So far, we have imposed restrictions on five individuals with a U.S.-designated Iranian company responsible for UAV design and designated seven Iranian UAV producers. Additionally, Commerce amended the Export Administration Regulations to impose new export control measures on Iran.

Question. Why does the Administration continue issuing nuclear project waivers to Rosatom, a Russian state-owned enterprise involved in the invasion of Ukraine?

Answer. Earlier this year, I issued a waiver to enable third parties to facilitate certain nuclear nonproliferation- and safety-related activities with Iran that remain in the U.S. national interest, irrespective of the JCPOA, including operations, training, and services related to Bushehr Nuclear Power Plant Unit 1. I decided to exclude from the waiver the construction of additional reactor units at Bushehr to ensure the waiver is tailored narrowly to achieving U.S. nonproliferation and nuclear safety objectives.

Question. How does the Administration plan to prevent sanctions evasion through Russian and Iranian oil sales to China and other countries?

Answer. The PRC is Iran's largest oil customer. We have continued to enforce our sanctions against Iran, including targeting of PRC-based entities engaged in sanctions evasion. For example, on March 9 we designated a "shadow banking" network of 39 entities across multiple jurisdictions, including the PRC, for facilitating transactions worth tens of billions of dollars annually for the Iranian regime.

Question. The Iranian "ghost armada" has grown from approximately 60 to over 300 vessels during the Biden administration. What specific steps is the Biden administration taking to counter illicit sales of Iranian oil to China, laundering Russian oil on international markets, and illicit sales to other countries?

Answer. The Departments of the Treasury, Commerce, and State have imposed sanctions on 150 entities and individuals across multiple jurisdictions involved in the production, sale, and transfer of Iranian petroleum and petrochemical products abroad under this Administration. We have sanctioned 41 vessels linked to Iran that were engaged in sanctions evasion, particularly petrochemical sales. We also sanctioned 39 "shadow banking" entities across multiple jurisdictions for facilitating illicit sales and transport of Iranian petrochemical and petroleum products.

Question. Do you support expediting Israel's request for KC-46 aerial refueling tanker aircraft to strengthen deterrence against Iran?

Answer. The U.S. commitment to Israel's security is ironclad, and assisting Israel in developing and maintaining a strong and ready self-defense capability is vital to U.S. national interests. Unfortunately, defense industrial capacity challenges are impacting schedules across many of our programs, and we also need to consider U.S. Air Force readiness requirements in determining our delivery schedule. We are working with the Government of Israel to identify interim solutions to meet its aerial refueling needs.

Question. How does the Administration plan to replenish munitions stored in Israel from the drawdown of support to Ukraine?

Answer. The U.S. commitment to Israel's security is ironclad. For questions on strategic planning of pre-positioned war reserve stocks, I would refer you to the Department of Defense.

Question. Arab-Israeli normalization through the Abraham Accords has had many economic, social, and security benefits. The Negev Forum, which builds on the Abraham Accords, presents an opportunity to further increase normalization benefits and incentivize other countries to join the Abraham Accords. How does the Administration plan to encourage expanding the membership of the Abraham Accords?

Answer. The Administration is strongly encouraging countries across the region to normalize their relations with Israel, as well as to join multilateral initiatives like the Negev Forum where they can benefit from cooperation among members, including Israel. We will continue to work closely with governments who have joined the Abraham Accords and the Negev Forum to support these bilateral and multilateral initiatives, as well as work with the private sector, non-profits, and other organizations to identify new opportunities to expand cooperation with Israel.

Question. How can the Administration amplify the success of the Abraham Accords?

Answer. The Administration strongly supports the Abraham Accords and normalization agreements between Israel and countries in the Arab and Muslim worlds. I regularly work with our partners across the region to highlight the significant benefits of the Abraham Accords and expand normalization to new countries. I also amplify the Abraham Accords by working to support multilateral initiatives like the Negev Forum and I2U2, demonstrating the benefits of Arab-Israeli cooperation to populations across the broader region.

Question. How will the Administration encourage economic relations among Abraham Accords/Negev Forum participants?

Answer. Just last month, Israel and the UAE signed a comprehensive free trade pact—the first between an Arab country and Israel, with trade surpassing \$3 billion in 2022. Bahrain and Israel also have a bilateral trade agreement that has generated a similar growth in trade. We are building on this already significant economic cooperation with Israel and expanding it to the broader region through multilateral initiatives like I2U2, the Negev Forum, and Project Prosperity.

Question. How will the Administration encourage social relations among Abraham Accords/Negev Forum participants?

Answer. We are working to enhance people-to-people initiatives between Israel and other countries in the region, leveraging ongoing work through frameworks such as the Negev Forum Education and Coexistence and Tourism Working Groups. Our team is also engaged with religious institutions, non-profits, and the private sector to encourage the development of non-governmental initiatives that promote religious and cultural understanding and strengthen people-to-people ties.

Question. How will the Administration encourage security relations among Abraham Accords/Negev Forum participants?

Answer. Israel's integration into the region and its strong partnerships with the UAE, Bahrain, and Morocco, in addition to its longstanding relationships with Egypt and Jordan, has created important new opportunities to enhance regional security and stability. I consult regularly with the Department of Defense to ensure our efforts mutually reinforce regional security cooperation. I continue to press for deeper security cooperation between Israel and its neighbors through bilateral initiatives and multilateral constructs such as the Negev Forum Regional Security Working Group.

Question. Saudi Arabia has expressed a willingness to normalize relations with Israel in exchange for changes in U.S. policy to include a security commitment and non-standard 123 agreement. What concrete steps is the Administration taking to

reach agreement on these issues and add Saudi Arabia to the circle of friends with Israel?

Answer. The United States strongly supports Israel's integration into the Middle East, including normalized relations with Saudi Arabia. The Administration's engagement already has resulted in critical steps like the opening of Saudi airspace to flights to and from Israel. The Administration also supports Saudi Arabia's clean energy transition. The United States commenced negotiations with Saudi Arabia in 2012 to establish a peaceful nuclear cooperation (123) agreement. We will continue to work with the Kingdom on these goals.

Question. Syria: What action is the Administration taking to oppose normalization between the Assad regime and our Middle Eastern partners?

Answer. This Administration will not support efforts to normalize or rehabilitate Bashar al-Assad, which we have regularly and vocally made clear to our partners and allies. In those discussions, we continue to underline the Assad regime's horrific atrocities against Syrians, as well as its continuing efforts to deny much of the country access to humanitarian aid and security. We also continue to emphasize that U.S. sanctions remain in place and that any entity seeking to invest in Syria could risk exposure to U.S. sanctions.

Question. Do you agree the Arab Gas Pipeline, which would supply gas to Lebanon via Syria, would be susceptible to diversion by the Assad regime?

Answer. This Administration is focused on maximizing the benefits of a potential deal to the Lebanese people—who continue to struggle with an acute energy crisis—while minimizing any potential benefit to the Assad regime. These agreements could help Lebanon begin to address its energy crisis in a sustainable and transparent manner. The Administration awaits final details of the project's scope, along with the financing details, before we can evaluate any potential risk.

Question. Do you agree that the Arab Gas Pipeline, if pursued, would violate Caesar sanctions? If no, please provide a detailed legal explanation.

Answer. The Administration has not waived Caesar Act sanctions, which remain an important tool to press for accountability of the Assad regime's atrocious record of human rights abuses. The Administration awaits final details of the scope of the project, along with financing details. Once those details are finalized, we will be able to evaluate the potential sanctions implications.

Question. How is the Administration working to prevent Syria's continuing emergence as a narcotic state through the illegal production and distribution of captagon and other illicit substances?

Answer. The Department is working with interagency colleagues to draft an interagency strategy to disrupt and dismantle the captagon trade, as required in the 2023 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA). Several U.S. Government agencies provide support to our law enforcement partners in the region including through information sharing and capacity building. The Department is also actively working with interagency partners to leverage a range of tools to address the captagon trade, including sanctions.

Question. Given Saudi Arabia's dramatic improvement to reduce civilian casualties, do you support supplying Saudi Arabia with the precision guided missiles (PGM) needed to deter Iran and its proxies, such as the Houthis?

Answer. To bring an end to the conflict, the Administration has ended all support for offensive operations in the war in Yemen, including relevant arms sales. However, the Administration has continued to support Saudi Arabia defending its sovereignty and territorial integrity against threats from Iranian-supplied forces in multiple countries. It remains in the United States' vital national interest to help our Gulf partners defend themselves against external aggression. However, the Administration has not changed its policy against providing offensive weapons to Saudi Arabia.

Question. Do delays in security assistance to Saudi Arabia open the door for strategic competitors like Russia and China to supply Saudi Arabia with defense articles?

Answer. The United States remains Saudi Arabia's partner of choice when it comes to defense cooperation. We have a robust system in place to prioritize the transfer of certain systems to our partners in a manner that best advances U.S. national interests and is consistent with U.S. values. In contrast, we assess that Russia's poor military performance in Ukraine and growing relationship with Iran will likely be deterrents to closer cooperation between Saudi Arabia and Russia.

Question. Would the United States be disadvantaged by Russia or China supplying defense articles to Saudi Arabia, or any other Middle East partner?

Answer. Neither Russia nor the PRC is displacing the United States as the security partner of choice in Saudi Arabia or across the Middle East. We continue to maintain robust defense cooperation with our partners in the region while PRC sales to the region remain comparatively miniscule. The United States raises its concerns with Middle Eastern partners over the potential costs and liabilities inherent in acquiring defense technology from suppliers in the PRC and Russia.

Question. SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIA: Have terrorism threats to South and Central Asia increased since the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan in August 2021?

Answer. The threat of terrorism from Afghanistan remains high and the State Department has issued a level four travel advisory asking U.S. citizens not to travel to Afghanistan. Terrorist groups in Afghanistan pose a threat to countries in the region. The United States continues to press the Taliban to uphold their counterterrorism commitments and works with countries in the region to counter terrorist threats. President Biden has made clear that when the Taliban fail to remove terrorist threats, then the United States will do so, as it did with Ayman al-Zawahiri.

Question. The United States does not currently provide any security assistance to Pakistan. Given the withdrawal from Afghanistan and credible reports of terrorists harbored in Afghanistan, should the United States re-visit security assistance to Pakistan?

Answer. We share Pakistan's concern over the ability of terrorists to operate from Afghanistan. While large-scale military grant assistance remains suspended, the Department continues to support Pakistani counterterrorism efforts, including through the Bureau of Counterterrorism-funded Anti-Terrorism Assistance (ATA) program, INL support to police and the Frontier Corps, and foreign military and direct commercial sales. The March U.S.-Pakistan Counterterrorism Dialogue furthered cooperation on counterterrorism efforts.

Question. What conditions must be met for the United States to restart security assistance to Pakistan?

Answer. While we do not envision a return to large-scale military grant assistance to Pakistan in the near term, we continue to work closely with our Pakistani counterparts to expand cooperation in areas of shared security interests. These include counterterrorism, border security, humanitarian aid and disaster relief, and maritime security. Recent engagements, including the February mid-level defense dialogue and March counterterrorism dialogue, as well as our continued support for Pakistan's F-16 program, illustrate our robust collaboration in these areas.

Question. Please explain the justification for more than tripling the South and Central Asia regional foreign military finance budget.

Answer. The Department has consistently requested a robust foreign military financing (FMF) budget for the South and Central Asia (SCA) region. The FY 2024 FMF request for the SCA region is comparable to prior years' request level, including the FY 2022 \$50 million request. The FY 2024 FMF request reflects the Department's commitment to the Administration's Indo-Pacific Strategy and Central Asia security objectives.

Question. What is the difference between the "Central Asia Regional" FMF and the "South and Central Asia Regional" FMF?

Answer. "Central Asia Regional" foreign military financing (FMF) is requested for the Central Asia countries of Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Turkmenistan. "South and Central Asia Regional" FMF is requested in support of security goals in the Indo-Pacific and will likely benefit Bangladesh, Maldives, Nepal, and Sri Lanka. However, all countries in the SCA region may benefit depending on the requirements in the year of execution.

Question. How will you ensure the \$122.9 million in economic support fund (ESF) for Afghanistan will not be diverted by the Taliban?

Answer. The Department of State and USAID conduct regular and rigorous analysis by third-party contract organizations and international NGOs to prevent diversion and ensure that assistance reaches the intended beneficiaries. Implementing partners must comply with robust financial and programmatic monitoring, reporting, and compliance mechanisms, as enumerated by both the Department's standard terms and conditions for federal awards as well as consistent with U.S. laws and regulations. Through this, we can identify attempted diversion and suspend or terminate programs, if necessary.

Question. Afghanistan was listed among “major drug transit or major illicit drug producing countries” for Fiscal Year 2023. Why does the budget request cut international narcotics and law enforcement (INCLE) funds?

Answer. The FY 2024 INCLE request for Afghanistan is reduced due to the changed operating environment and adjustments to the type and scale of programs we have in Afghanistan. The Department has sufficient prior-year INCLE funds to support some programs such as counternarcotics programs focusing on alternative development, drug demand reduction, and crop monitoring and analysis—without going through or benefiting the Taliban.

Question. Pakistan was listed among “major drug transit or major illicit drug producing countries” for Fiscal Year 2023. Why does the budget request cut INCLE funds?

Answer. Pakistan remains a major transit country for the southern trafficking route of narcotics from Afghanistan. The FY 2023 INCLE request for Pakistan takes into consideration programming needs, operating environment, and prior year funds to adequately support Pakistan’s counternarcotics efforts. Beyond counternarcotics, Pakistan INCLE funds also support projects in the justice, law enforcement, corrections, and gender sectors.

RESPONSES OF SECRETARY ANTONY BLINKEN TO QUESTIONS
SUBMITTED BY SENATOR TODD YOUNG

Question. What is the State Department and the Coordinator for Afghan Relocation Efforts (CARE) Team doing to ensure that our Afghan allies are receiving timely assistance for asylum claims?

Answer. Individuals in the United States may apply for asylum regardless of country of nationality or current immigration status. Asylum claims are adjudicated by U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS). We would direct asylum-related questions to USCIS.

Question. What is preventing the State Department and the Coordinator for Afghan Relocation Efforts (CARE) Team from more rapidly assisting our Afghan allies with asylum claims?

Answer. Asylum claims are adjudicated by U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS). We would direct asylum-related questions to USCIS.

RESPONSES OF SECRETARY ANTONY BLINKEN TO QUESTIONS
SUBMITTED BY SENATOR JOHN BARRASSO

Question. The State Department recently changed expected wait time for passport processing. Processing times went from the typical 6–9 weeks for a routine application to 10–13 weeks. Currently, the expedited processing takes 7–9 weeks. How many U.S. citizens have missed their trips due to the State Department’s delay in processing passports since January?

Answer. We do not collect or verify data on the number of U.S. citizens who may have potentially missed their trip. From January 1 to April 6, our staff served more than 269,000 customers with emergency or urgent travel at our counters and issued over 4.7 million passports for customers who applied through the mail. We strongly recommend customers apply early, and by mail or at an acceptance facility, and undertake public messaging campaigns to this effect.

Question. What is your strategy to address the current backlog and extended wait times for passport processing?

Answer. We are making every effort to tackle unprecedented demand for passports. CA has instituted an “all hands on deck” posture requiring passport headquarters staff and field managers to adjudicate applications, authorized over 30,000 overtime hours a month, and recruited volunteers, including re-employed annuitants, to work in Washington, DC’s Satellite Office. We have been aggressively recruiting new staff since January 2022 and successfully increased our adjudicative staff by more than 100 new employees, with another 170 candidates in the recruitment pipeline.

Question. What is your best estimate on when you expect wait times to return to normal?

Answer. Passport processing times historically fluctuate based on demand and seasonality. We posted increased processing times most recently on March 24 as a

result of the unprecedented demand levels observed in 2023. If 2023 follows historical patterns, processing times may decrease in the fall. We are committed to reducing processing times as quickly as possible.

Question. When did you start bringing on retired employees to help address the issues with passport processing?

Answer. Passport Services began hiring retired Foreign Service employees to help adjudicate passport renewal applications in the Satellite Office of the Washington Passport Agency in 2019. In FY 2021, we obtained delegated authority from OPM to approve reemployment without reduction of annuity (a dual compensation waiver) for former Civil Service staff with passport adjudication experience to help address passport application backlogs in FYs 2022–2023. We are working on a request to extend the waiver into FYs 2024–2025 to augment our adjudicative capacity.

Question. How many are currently helping address the backlog?

Answer. Applications are accepted at our network of over 7,000 acceptances facilities. More than 1,900 government staff and 2,000 contract staff are contributing to the Department's processing and/or adjudication of passport applications. We also have 20 retirees and 34 staff from other parts of Consular Affairs providing additional assistance at the Satellite Office in DC and across the country at our passport agencies and centers. Many other offices are helping with recruiting, clearing, onboarding, and training new staff so that we can further increase our adjudicative capacity.

Question. Are additional trainings necessary?

Answer. Training courses and programs specific to the needs of newly-hired staff and returning retirees are already established and provided timely as part of onboarding or return to duty. The formal new-hire training program is typically completed in the first 2 months of duty for new passport specialists. Retirees complete 1-day refresher training when returning to the workforce.

Question. How long do you anticipate needing the assistance of these additional workers?

Answer. We will need to devote additional resources to address the passport applications pending adjudication until our adjudicative capacity exceeds the volume of incoming new applications. Demand is unlikely to begin tapering until we approach the fall, therefore we anticipate the assistance of additional workers will be needed until processing times decline. We continue to aggressively hire new adjudicative staff and are reviewing our staffing levels to ensure we can best serve the American public.

Question. The State Department's budget request for Fiscal Year 2024 included funding for an additional 164 Foreign Service and 351 Civil Service personnel. The State Department indicated it would allocate the largest shares of these positions, about 204 positions, to bolster passport and visa processing. Beyond hiring additional staff, what actions does the State Department need to take to address the backlog and delays in passport processing?

Answer. We are maintaining a focus on modernization and efficiency, which calls for recruitment and retention of a skilled, dedicated workforce. The online passport renewal pilot demonstrated that applicants can and want the ability to submit applications from the convenience of their homes, without physical forms and mailing. Our employees processed applications using this technology both in the office and remotely, allowing them to continue to work when adverse weather conditions would have previously stopped all processing of passport applications.

Question. According to a 2021 report from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), China owns roughly 384,000 acres of U.S. agricultural land. Ownership jumped by 30 percent from 2019 to 2020. What national security and food supply chain risks are associated with foreign control over U.S. agricultural land by the Government of China?

Answer. National security concerns stem from the control and influence that the PRC can have over companies from the PRC. Risks may occur if a vulnerability is created because an investment can shift ownership, rights, or control of agricultural lands that are critical to United States supply chain resilience and be combined with foreign actor actions used to exploit that vulnerability.

Question. How are you working with the USDA to ensure the purchase of U.S. agricultural land by China and other countries does not pose a risk to the United States?

Answer. The State Department does not have any programs in place related to the prevention of private land purchases in the United States. We would refer you to Treasury on any questions regarding the Committee on Foreign Investment (CFIUS).

Question. What reporting requirements does the State Department currently provide Congress regarding foreign countries purchasing and owning agricultural land across our nation?

Answer. The Department defers to the USDA. The Agricultural Foreign Investment Disclosure Act (AFIDA) of 1978 established a nationwide system for the collection of information pertaining to foreign ownership in U.S. agricultural land. The regulations require foreign investors who acquire, transfer, or hold an interest in U.S. agricultural land to report such holdings and transactions to the Secretary of Agriculture. The Farm Service Agency (FSA) is responsible for the implementation of the law and regulations as they relate to foreign ownership of U.S. agricultural land.

Question. Before the U.S. House Committee on Homeland Security, U.S. Border Patrol Chief Raul Ortiz testified that the U.S. Department of Homeland Security does not have operational control of the border. This assessment is in direct contradiction of Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas' assertion that we have operational control of the border. Do you believe the United States has operational control of the southern border?

Answer. Yes, the United States has operational control of the southern border. The Department of State works closely with Mexico on issues related to border security and facilitating legitimate trade and travel across the U.S.-Mexico border. We also maintain five consulates along the border that support these efforts and provide critical support for U.S. citizens. I would defer you to the Department of Homeland Security for additional information on its agencies' operations along the border.

Question. When is the last time you met with Vice President Harris to discuss the crisis on the southern border?

Answer. Both the office of the Secretary and the Vice President are part of a continuous foreign policy process where we hold regular discussions on a variety of foreign policy issues in the Administration. We share our views on global issues, including humane management of irregular migration, through that process.

Question. U.S. National Security Council Spokesman John Kirby recently stated that Poland's decision to send its Soviet-designed fighter jets "doesn't change our calculus with regards to F-16s," in reference to providing Ukraine with F-16s. How would providing Ukraine with F-16s and A-10 Warthogs enhance Ukraine's ability to win the war?

Answer. As President Biden has said, we are not planning to provide F-16s to Ukraine at this time. We are focused on providing Ukraine military assistance that can be brought to bear rapidly, efficiently, and with maximum battlefield effect. We also strongly encourage other countries to continue providing the necessary military equipment for Ukraine to defend itself against Russia, and we are working to facilitate transfers as appropriate.

Question. What safeguards and accountability mechanisms are in place to ensure U.S. assistance to Ukraine is used appropriately and going to the intended recipients?

Answer. The Department of State takes very seriously the obligation to ensure appropriate oversight of all assistance as good stewards of U.S. resources. The Department of State employs multiple accountability safeguards and mechanisms, in conjunction with DoD, USAID, Treasury, and the World Bank, and is actively engaged with the Government of Ukraine to reinforce our joint commitment to effective oversight. Ambassador Brink and her team in Kyiv work in conjunction with inter-agency partners and the Government of Ukraine on accountability issues related to all foreign assistance, including budget support and security assistance. The World Bank manages budget support assistance provided by the United States through its trust funds in accordance with its financial control policies. State, USAID, and DoD inspectors general have increased the frequency and scope of their oversight reporting on U.S. assistance for Ukraine. In addition, State is procuring a contract for monitoring, evaluation, and audit services that will fund Ukraine-based oversight and produce analyses and reports.

The Department works with DoD to manage military assistance. The Government of Ukraine has shown they take the responsibility to safeguard arms seriously. We

are confident in the Government of Ukraine's commitment to appropriately safeguard and account for transferred U.S.-origin defense equipment.

Question. International treaties, such as the Montreal Protocol and the U.N. Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), continue to define China as a developing country. Do you believe China is a developing country?

Answer. As economic circumstances change in the PRC, the Department seeks opportunities to work with like-minded governments to reduce or eliminate inappropriate assistance or advantages the PRC might receive under agreements and multilateral frameworks. As we work to ensure the PRC does not benefit inappropriately, it is important to design approaches that will be effective in a particular context without inadvertently rallying other countries to support PRC positions.

Question. What are the differences between the requirements, assistance and obligations provided under the UNFCCC for the United States versus China?

Answer. The UNFCCC, which the United States joined in 1994, contains various categories of Parties for different purposes, including a non-binding emissions aim for so-called "Annex I" Parties (including the United States). The United States rejected the 1997 Kyoto Protocol, which imposed binding emissions obligations only on Annex I Parties. The 2015 Paris Agreement did away with characterizing Parties as included (or not included) in Annex I. On the core issue of emission reductions, all Parties—including both the United States and the PRC—are required to submit "nationally determined contributions," update them regularly, and report on their implementation. In terms of financial support, the Paris Agreement continues the UNFCCC's collective obligations to assist developing countries. It does not define "developing countries," an issue that is left to the various operating entities that serve the Agreement's financial mechanism.

Question. Are you committed to ensuring future treaties no longer define China as a developing country?

Answer. Treaties vary in how they establish or define categories such as "developing," "least developed," "middle-income," or "developed" countries, or whether such categories are even used. There is no uniform approach to defining "developing countries."

Therefore, as we seek to ensure that the PRC does not benefit inappropriately, it is important to design approaches that will be effective in each particular context. The United States will continue to build support with other governments for tailored approaches with respect to relevant international agreements.

Question. What is your plan to end China's unfair advantage of being mislabeled a developing country in the international community?

Answer. There is no one-size-fits-all approach to addressing this important issue. As we seek to ensure the PRC does not benefit from inappropriate assistance, it is important to design approaches that will be effective in a particular context and that will not backfire or inadvertently rally other countries in support of PRC positions. The Department therefore seeks opportunities on a case-by-case basis to work with likeminded governments in order to reduce or eliminate inappropriate assistance or advantages the PRC might receive under particular agreements or multilateral frameworks.

Question. How much funding has China received from the UNFCCC? Please provide the amount of money China received from various UNFCCC funding mechanisms, including but not limited to, the Global Environment Facility, the Special Climate Change Fund, the Least Developed Countries Fund, the Adaptation Fund established under the Kyoto Protocol in 2001, and the Green Climate Fund.

Answer. The People's Republic of China (PRC) has received approximately \$544 million in grants and \$100 million in loans from funds affiliated with the UNFCCC for climate-related activities. Since 1991, the PRC received \$538 million in grants for single-country climate-related activities from the Global Environment Facility (GEF), or roughly 6 percent of finance disbursed by the GEF for climate-related activities. The PRC also received \$5.9 million in grants for three projects with the Special Climate Change Fund and \$100 million in loans for one project with the Green Climate Fund. The PRC has not accessed funding from either the Least Developed Countries Fund or the Adaptation Fund.

Question. How much funding has the United States contributed to the UNFCCC? Please provide the amount of money the United States provided to various UNFCCC funding mechanisms, including but not limited to, the Global Environment Facility, the Special Climate Change Fund, the Least Developed Countries Fund, the Adap-

tation Fund established under the Kyoto Protocol in 2001, and the Green Climate Fund.

Answer. The United States has provided \$129.2 million to the UNFCCC since 1991. The United States has provided \$50 million to the Special Climate Change Fund since FY 2010, \$158.2 million to the Least Developed Countries Fund since FY 2010, \$0 to the Adaptation Fund, and \$1 billion to the Green Climate Fund since FY 2016. The United States has also contributed \$3.1 billion to the Global Environment Facility (GEF) since its inception in 1992. As the GEF serves as part of the financial mechanism for five multilateral environmental agreements, these funds have gone towards projects to deliver global environmental benefits for biodiversity, climate change, land degradation, international waters, and chemicals and waste.

Question. How much funding has China received from the Climate Investment Funds?

Answer. The People's Republic of China has not accessed any support from the Climate Investment Funds.

Question. How much funding has the United States contributed to the Climate Investment Funds?

Answer. The United States has contributed \$2.95 billion to the Climate Investment Funds since their establishment in 2008, comprised of \$950 million in loan contributions and \$2 billion in grant contributions.

Question. How much total funding has the Climate Investment Fund received from foreign governments and the private sector?

Answer. The Clean Technology Fund and the Strategic Climate Fund, together constituting the Climate Investment Funds (CIF), have received a total of \$11.5 billion in contributions since their establishment in 2008. Of this, \$8.5 billion has been received from foreign governments. Private sector actors do not contribute funds directly to the CIF but are recipients of CIF funding via the CIF's multilateral development bank implementing partners. The CIF have financed nearly \$1.9 billion in private sector projects and generated \$18.9 billion in private sector co-financing across the entire CIF project portfolio.

Question. As part of the Cancun Agreements in 2010, agreed to by the Obama Administration, developed country Parties to the UNFCCC, including the United States, committed to a goal of mobilizing jointly \$100 billion per year by 2020 to address the needs of developing countries. How much money was ultimately mobilized from 2010 to 2020 by the developed country parties?

Answer. From 2010 to 2020 developed country Parties to the UNFCCC have collectively mobilized at least \$565.5 billion to support climate action in developing countries. This includes finance from bilateral channels, multilateral channels (i.e., multilateral development banks and multilateral climate funds), and private finance mobilized, noting that data is not available on private finance mobilized for 2010, 2011, 2012, and 2015.

Question. How much money was mobilized by the United States?

Answer. From 2010–2020 the United States has reported \$24.8 billion in climate finance to support climate action in developing countries through bilateral channels and contributions to multilateral climate funds. In addition, the United States supports climate action in developing countries through its contributions to multilateral development banks and mobilizing private finance in cooperation with partners; these efforts are reported at the collective level rather than the individual country level in order to avoid double-counting.

Question. How much money was appropriated by Congress?

Answer. All climate finance provided by the United States is supported by budget authority appropriated by Congress. We look forward to continuing our close collaboration with Congress on financing.

Question. How much of the total U.S. contribution went to China?

Answer. Of the climate finance reported by the United States from 2010–2020, \$29.6 million has supported climate action in the PRC. Since 2018, the United States has not provided any climate finance to the PRC through its bilateral efforts.

Question. Since Russia's invasion of Ukraine, there have been several reports of Putin ordering the transfer of Ukrainian children to Russia to be adopted and become citizens. What efforts are being taken by the State Department to help reunite these vulnerable Ukrainian children with their families?

Answer. The United States is funding research and advocacy programs aimed at documenting and exposing Russia's system to forcibly relocate and "re-educate" Ukrainian children. In addition, we continue to raise awareness of Russia's war crimes, maintain the largest sanctions regime ever imposed on any country in history, and assist Ukrainian and other accountability efforts. Russia's limitation of access to these children by outside organizations complicates efforts to reunite them with their families, but we remain focused and undeterred.

Question. How does the Biden administration plan to hold Putin accountable for the forced abduction and deportation of Ukrainian children?

Answer. I determined that members of Russia's forces and other Russian officials have committed crimes against humanity in Ukraine, including deporting Ukrainian children to Russia. We will continue to appropriately declassify and publicize the Russian Government's actions, support the judicial process in Ukraine, and assist broader international investigations and accountability efforts. At the same time, we continue to maintain and expand the most extensive sanctions regime ever imposed on any country in history.

Question. What is the best estimate for the number of Ukrainian children who have been forcibly deported to Russia?

Answer. As of April 10, the Ukrainian Government is tracking more than 19,544 specific children forcibly transferred and deported to Russia, with only 364 returned to their parents or legal guardians to date. Some Ukrainian Government estimates put the actual number of children forced transfers and deportations as high as 150,000. It is hard to determine one single estimate given limited insight into Russia and Russia-occupied territory, the opaqueness of Russia's filtration operations which can result in deportation, and the number of children who are missing.

RESPONSES OF SECRETARY ANTONY BLINKEN TO QUESTIONS
SUBMITTED BY SENATOR CHRIS VAN HOLLEN

Question. Press Freedom: India and Pakistan: The State Department's Human Rights Report was released on March 20—according to the report, both India and Pakistan have seen increasing threats on press freedom and the report indicates that they are increasingly dangerous places for journalists trying to do their jobs. The State Department is not alone in sounding the alarm—Reporters Without Borders (RSF) ranks India at 150 out of 180 and Pakistan at 157 out of 180 in the World Press Freedom Index and cites the dangers involved with being a journalist in both countries. According to both the Human Rights Report and RSF, journalists are subjected to harassment, threats, and even death in the course of their work. This is concerning not only for freedom of speech but for the overall rule of law in both countries. What is the State Department doing to not only promote free speech but to protect journalists in both India and Pakistan?

Answer. The United States regularly consults with India and Pakistan at the highest levels on issues impacting the press and free speech advocates. I also engage regularly with civil society, tech companies, and media outlets on how we can encourage governments to uphold international standards and mitigate the impact of regulations on freedom of expression.

The Democracy, Human Rights and Labor Bureau, through the Human Rights and Democracy Fund earmark, protects human rights defenders in Pakistan through programming that increases the capacity of young journalists to hold their governments accountable and builds sustainable initiatives to support the next generation of independent journalists.

Question. Israel NGO Legislation: The Israeli Knesset is expected to take up a new bill which would require reporting and allow the government to impose up to a 37 percent tax on Israeli registered organizations receiving more than \$50,000 in funding from foreign entities like the U.S. NGOs working in the West Bank must register with the Israeli Government in order to operate, and this additional taxation would be at the discretion of the government. Organizations that primarily receive donations from private individuals and not from foreign governments would not be impacted. When Egypt, another large recipient of U.S. assistance, passed restrictive laws designed to weaken NGOs in 2017, the U.S. Government strongly objected to those measures. Does the Biden administration have concerns about this impending legislation, and if so, has it raised these concerns directly with the Israeli Government? If so, what feedback have you received?

Answer. The United States strongly believes in the importance of civil society organizations and the critical role they play in defending human rights and sup-

porting peacebuilding efforts. The United States has made clear the importance of ensuring that independent civil society organizations in the West Bank and Israel are able to continue their important work, including by ensuring legitimate organizations do not face burdensome economic requirements that make it difficult to carry out their work.

Question. What measures, if any, is the Biden administration prepared to take to continue to support work being done by NGOs to advance humanitarian efforts and human rights?

Answer. The U.S. Government strongly believes that respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, and a strong civil society, are critically important to responsible, responsive, and democratic governance. This Administration values the advancement of human rights along with the human rights violations and abuses monitoring that independent NGOs undertake in the West Bank and Gaza, Israel, and elsewhere. The United States continues to engage with the UN, NGOs, and international partners to support civil society organizations.

Question. The Minerals Security Partnership launched last summer with the goal to build a framework for developing critical minerals with friendly countries, and supporting mining projects with high ESG standards. How effective is the MSP at breaking into markets where other countries, namely PRC, are already present?

Answer. Historically, extractive industry business models turned into bad deals for landowners, governments, mine workers, and communities surrounding mines. The Minerals Security Partnership seeks to present a different value proposition by supporting projects along the mineral value chain—including extraction, processing, and recycling—through financing, promoting high standards for responsible mining and processing, and engaging project operators and governments to champion projects that benefit all involved. This should give more options to countries hosting these resources.

Question. What does the MSP offer to nations with large deposits of critical minerals that makes these partnerships an attractive option?

Answer. The Minerals Security Partnership shares information among partners on minerals projects and develops action plans to support the most promising projects through coordinated support including financing, promoting high standards for responsible mining and processing, and engaging project operators and governments. This should generate more options for countries with these resources. We offer a different value proposition compared to the PRC and hear repeatedly from foreign interlocutors that they would like to have more options and more value-added operations in their countries.

Question. Semiconductor Agreement: Following the agreement between the United States, Japan, and Netherlands on semiconductor exports: What are the next steps to ensure the PRC is not getting access to the most advanced semiconductors?

Answer. We regularly consult with allies and partners who are Participating States of the Wassenaar Arrangement on export controls. We will continue to hold regular dialogues with allies and partners to discuss technology, supply chain resilience, and ensuring our technology is not used to undermine our national security. We will continue to evaluate the impacts of the U.S. export controls regulations, which were implemented to reduce PRC capabilities in supercomputing and advanced semiconductor manufacturing over time.

Question. The U.S. made this deal with the Netherlands, and not with the EU. Many EU countries, like Germany and Belgium, supply parts crucial to making semiconductors. How is the U.S. engaging with the rest of the EU to safeguard the supply chain?

Answer. Since 2021, the U.S. and the EU have worked together through the U.S.-EU Trade and Technology Council (TTC) to build more resilient semiconductor supply chains by sharing information and best practices, and by developing a common understanding of semiconductor market dynamics.

Our goal is to avoid subsidy races and market distortions and ensure a resilient, sustainable, and innovative semiconductors value chain. At the December 2022 TTC, the U.S. and EU announced a joint early warning mechanism to address and mitigate semiconductor supply chain disruptions.

Question. Elections are scheduled to take place in Turkey on May 14. In the lead-up to the elections, the Government of Turkey has intensified a media crackdown and sentenced a leading opposition figure to prison for just long enough to disqualify him from running. The state media agency has begun to heavily sanction and fine Turkish TV stations for their coverage of the earthquake and has continued to stifle

social media, including banning Twitter and a popular forum site. There are also concerns over the past performance of the Turkish Election Council, which has not addressed irregularities that favor Erdogan, and annulled elections not in his favor. What, if anything, is the U.S. doing to promote and ensure free and fair elections in Turkey?

Answer. It is in the U.S. national interest for Turkiye to be a stable, democratic, and prosperous Ally. The Administration regularly reinforces the importance of democracy and human rights to our bilateral relationship—including free and fair democratic electoral processes—and urges the Turkish Government to respect human rights and fundamental freedoms. We continue to raise with the government our concerns about the Turkish media environment. The United States supports a robust election observation mission and plans to contribute observers to the upcoming observation mission of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) to Turkiye’s elections.

Question. Will the U.S. assist in any election monitoring or oversight?

Answer. The United States will contribute 26 short-term observers, contingent on availability of funding, to the election observation mission in Turkey of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). The mission will include 28 long-term and 350 short-term observers from many of the OSCE’s 57 participating States.

Question. *Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment (PGII):* During the SFRC Africa and Global Health Policy Subcommittee hearing on the FY23 Budget for Africa on July 27, 2022, I emphasized the importance of investment in infrastructure. I highlighted President Biden’s Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment, which he had just announced with the G7 and the EU, to fund infrastructure projects in developing nations—but this new initiative seems to build on a number of existing authorities and pots of money. The FY24 budget requests \$250 million for PGII—but there are claims that the budget “supports more than \$50 billion to support PGII,” and up to \$600 billion over 5 years. Could you please provide a breakdown of the \$50 billion mentioned in the budget request to support the PGII, including how much is being pulled from which accounts, how much is “new” money, and how much is from existing appropriations?

Answer. The \$50 billion for the Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment (PGII) in the President’s Budget is an attribution of existing resources across the U.S. Government in support of our commitments to the G7 initiative. Of this \$50 billion, \$4.7 billion is Economic Support Funds (ESF) across State and USAID in the following sectors: digital connectivity and cyber security (\$296M), health systems and health security (\$2.1B), gender equity (\$209M) and climate and energy security (\$2.1B). While this funding is not “new,” it represents programming that is in direct support of the important objectives of PGII.

Question. How does the PGII differ from our previous approaches to funding development projects around the world?

Answer. The Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment (PGII) was launched in partnership with the G7 to offer a credible alternative for financing of sustainable, quality infrastructure in emerging markets, centered on unlocking public and private capital. In particular, PGII is seeking to expand strategic investments in hard and virtual infrastructure across clean energy supply chains, trusted ICT networks, connective transportation corridors, and resilient health systems to create eco-systems of transformative economic corridors and development. Through improved collaboration within the U.S. Government and with our G7 partners, PGII aims to better deploy our respective tools to leverage private capital and advance strategic projects.

Question. *Pakistan:* Pakistan’s continued human rights abuses are troubling. The 2022 Human Rights Report, which spans both the current and previous government, finds that “there was a lack of government accountability, and abuses, including corruption and misconduct, often went unpunished, fostering a culture of impunity.” These abuses are not confined to a specific government, and are an alarming continued trend. Journalists and civil society activists are routinely jailed and harassed for trying to do their jobs. How will the U.S. engage with the Pakistani Government on the Human Rights Report to encourage meaningful reforms and respect for human rights?

Answer. The United States regularly engages with the Pakistani Government, through Pakistan’s embassy in Washington and our embassy and consulates in Pakistan, on human rights issues, particularly religious freedom and freedom of speech and media. We will continue to implement programs and initiatives that sup-

port Pakistan's capacity to curb human rights abuses and promote accountability, while seeking to empower vulnerable populations. My senior leadership and I have raised human rights concerns with Pakistan's Foreign Minister and with Pakistani political leadership in Islamabad. We have emphasized the need to allow political space for the opposition.

Question. Visa Wait Times: Secretary Blinken—As you know, international tourism to the U.S. has a significant impact on the economy. According to the Department of Commerce, in 2019 roughly 80 million international travelers visited the United States, contributing nearly \$240 billion to the U.S. economy. That year, 43 percent of international visitors—and \$120 billion in spending—came from countries where a visa is required to enter the United States. Unfortunately, current tourism numbers continue to lag pre-pandemic levels. It's clear, however, that the continued slow recovery for tourism is at least partially attributable to a severe backlog in the processing of U.S. visitor visas. For example, we're seeing unusually long delays in the processing of visas for first-time visitors from Brazil, India and Mexico. In Brazil, wait times can take up to a year and 3 months. The situation is worse in India, where wait times for a visa appointment can take up to 2 years and 8 months. According to an analysis by economists at the U.S. Travel Association, in 2023, the U.S. is projected to lose 6.6 million potential visitors and \$11.6 billion in projected loss spending as a result of likely international travelers being unable to obtain a visitor visa to travel to the U.S. in a timely manner. In the top three largest markets, Brazil, India and Mexico, projected spending losses could total \$5.2 billion alone. Given the scale of this problem, I want to ask: What action is the State Department taking to decrease visa interview wait times and increase the economic impact from international visitors?

Answer. As of April 1, the median global nonimmigrant visa wait time for first time applicants was under 2 months, about half of what it was in October 2022. Wait times reflect heavy demand for visas; in Mexico and Brazil, we issued more visitor visas in FY 2022 than we did in FY 2019. The Department is focused on equipping all posts with the staffing and resources needed to continue to reduce wait times. Reasons for the slow recovery of inbound travel are complex. For example, citizens of Visa Waiver Program countries, who make up the majority of U.S. tourists, show reduced levels of inbound travel.

Question. Is the State Department developing a strategy to bolster staffing and resources for countries seeing unusually long wait times?

Answer. The Department is striving to ensure that as many adjudicators as possible are assigned to overseas positions in order to reach worldwide pre-pandemic staffing by the end of this year. In the first quarter of 2023, the Department surged staff to locations with long interview appointment wait times for visitor visa applicants, such as India and Mexico. Consular officers in some overseas locations are remotely adjudicating tens of thousands of interview waiver visas each week to support posts with long wait times. Wait times in other visa categories, including renewals, are low.

