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THE STATE OF AMERICAN DIPLOMACY IN 2023: GROWING CONFLICTS, BUDGET CHALLENGES, AND GREAT POWER COMPETITION

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

The committee met, pursuant to notice, at 10:23 a.m., in room 210, House Visitor Center, Hon. Michael McCaul (chairman of the committee) presiding.

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

The purpose of this hearing is to discuss the State Department's Fiscal Year 2024 budget request and explore the myriad challenges facing the United States and its diplomats around the globe.

I now recognize myself for an opening statement.

Mr. Secretary, welcome, and we have no shortage of crises around the world for sure and there's a lot to talk about.

I believe that we are in a very dangerous period in history, the likes of which we have not seen since my father's war, World War II.

After the debacle in the fall of Afghanistan we had a hearing on that. We saw our adversaries respond. We saw weakness and we projected weakness, not strength. History proves when you project strength you get peace. But when you project weakness it does invite aggression and war.

You only need to look back to Neville Chamberlain and Hitler, and, really, the course of the time has proven that axiom. So I think we need to start projecting more strength and deterrence.

We saw not too long after the fall of Afghanistan on satellite imagery the Russian Federation moving toward Ukraine. It was never a question of if. It was a question of when with Mr. Putin, and I think from what he saw he decided it was the time and we saw the troop presence and then we saw the invasion.

And then we see Chairman Xi. Chairman Xi is threatening Taiwan as we speak. They both met just recently, as you know, in Moscow.

I know, you met with the foreign minister of China when you were at the Munich Security Conference right after the spy balloon went over the United States filming some of our most sensitive military nuclear sites.

So this is an intense time and we are starting to see this alliance not—very similar, in my judgment, to what we saw in World War II. Russia, China, Iran, and North Korea.

Now Mr. Putin is begging Iran for weapons. He has the Iranian drones in Crimea. I want to get the weapons in there to take out
those Iranian drones but they do not have them because you won't give them to them—the longer-range artillery to win.

I do not want to see them bleed over the winter and spring. I want to see victory, not a drawn-out conflict that has no resolution in sight.

The threat of communist China cannot be overstated. They are the number-one threat long term to our national security. It’s why I introduced and passed the CHIPS Act, to pull the supply chain of semiconductors out of Taiwan and China and make them here in the United States. But still 90 percent of that advanced semiconductor manufacturing takes place in Taiwan.

So when people ask why is Taiwan important, imagine if China invaded Taiwan tomorrow and controlled 90 percent of the global supply. We would be in a world of hurt.

I personally think Chairman Xi is going to try to influence the election. If he fails, then I think Plan B will be a blockade and an invasion that will be on a scale that will make Ukraine look like a very small thing. A massive cyber attack.

Taiwan is not prepared. We have no joint military exercises. The weapons I signed off on 3 years ago have yet to go into country. I do not understand why this takes so long, and if we do not have the deterrence like we did not have the deterrence with Ukraine—I called for sanctions and weapons before the invasion.

I think we should be doing the same thing with Taiwan. We need to arm them and prepare them to provide deterrence along with AUKUS and the Quad to deter the Chinese from an invasion, which I think, again, would be devastating.

Iran is at 85 percent enrichment. You know, the bombs dropped in Hiroshima and Nagasaki had 80 percent enrichment. They’re already there, Mr. Secretary. Ninety percent, they say, is weapons grade.

What are we doing to stop this and are we giving the Iranians a strong message that a nuclear Iran is not acceptable? We’re seeing China come into the Middle East and negotiate agreements between Saudis and Iran.

I haven’t seen the Abraham Accords expanded at all under your tenure. But we have to make it clear to them what a nuclear Iran would mean and we have to support Israel in that fight.

Meanwhile, your President, our President, rescinded the migrant protection protocols “Remain in Mexico” that the State Department was involved in which opened our borders up into a wide open invasion from the cartels. Now even your own Border Patrol admit have operational control of the border. That's my home State of Texas and I've been dealing with this issue as a Federal prosecutor to chairman of Homeland and now witnessing what I'm seeing is the worst I've ever seen.

You and I have talked about fentanyl and I applaud your efforts to talk to the leadership in China about the precursors coming from China into Mexico that have killed a hundred thousand young people in this country just over the last year.

To put that in perspective, that's more than who died in the Vietnam War and its an attack on our young people.

So Mr. Secretary, you know, my time is limited. There's so many things I could talk about that I do not have time. But right now
you are in a very important position in a very important time in history and the parallels to 1939—when I go to Poland they say it’s Hitler invading Poland all over you.

They see it that way. They have Auschwitz in their backyard. They remember the war crimes as we see war crimes taking place in Ukraine. As I went to Bucha, as you know, to see the mass grave sites and went to Kyiv to meet with President Zelensky, and I will be going to Asia.

Those two threats, the European theater and Pacific that my father’s generation liberated from tyranny in strong support of freedom and democracy are now at risk, now at threat.

Now they want to change the maps from what the greatest generation liberated. We cannot allow that to happen, sir. I want to work with you.

We’re all Americans and I believe most members on this committee agree with that assessment. But I do have to point out my concerns and, I think, the weaknesses and we’ll have more time to discuss that in our questioning.

I want to just close with this, though. We had a Marine Sergeant, Vargas-Andrews, testified before this committee that he had the suicide bomber in his sights before the bomb went off.

He met with his team. He met with his intelligence team. An intelligence bulletin went out describing the suicide bomber. They got the identification. They got the psy ops. They pushed it up the chain of command and the response was, I do not have authority to give you permission to engage against the threat.

And the question was asked, well, who has the authority? I do not know. I’ll have to get back to you. And guess what? Nobody got back to him. And then guess what? Just hours later the bomb went off, killing 13 servicemen and women, 140 Afghans, and injuring 50 including Major Sergeant Anders Vargas, who lost his limb, his leg, who had 40 surgeries.

We have the mother—the mother of the woman, the Marine sergeant who was killed in that deadly blast, and I’ll never forget giving her a hug and she said, I’m devastated to know that this tragedy could have been prevented and my daughter could still be alive today but for the negligence of what happened in Afghanistan that day.

And I want to recognize her, Christy Shamblin, the mother of Marine Sergeant Nicole Gee, who was killed at Abbey Gate. She is in this room today.

And to—let me just say to her and all the veterans of that conflict you did not get wounded in vain. You did not die in vain. What you did was worth it because you protected America for 20 years from attacks. And I would ask, Christy Shamblin, if you could stand so you can be recognized.

Now, I was told she was going to be here. There she is.

[Applause.]

Chairman McCaul. Let me just close by saying I will not rest, Christy, until we get answers, until people are held accountable for what happened to your daughter and the other servicemen and women and the Afghans. I will not rest until we get answers, and we will if we have to go all the way up the chain of command to do it.
With that, I now recognize the Ranking Member, Mr. Meeks.

Mr. MECKS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Let me begin by thanking Secretary Blinken for appearing before the committee today to discuss the Biden Administration’s proposed international affairs budget for Fiscal Year 2024.

Let me also thank you, Mr. Secretary, for—we all the House Foreign Affairs Committee for your focus on diplomacy. That’s what this committee is all about. The Arms—the HASC—the Arms Committee deals with defense and DoD and we know the significance and importance of diplomacy going alongside the Defense Department—with the Defense Department, and what the State Department and what we’re here to discuss today has to deal with the responsibility that the Department of State has.

And I am extremely glad to see that the Administration’s budget request prioritized diplomacy and development, ensuring that we have the tools necessary to lead on the global stage and leverage the United States’ soft power—soft power, which better positions the United States to address global challenges, deepen our alliances, and advance our U.S. interests.

Fact of the matter, Mr. Secretary, had not President Biden led—when we talk about particularly Ukraine—led by having our allies join with us, if we had jumped out there by ourselves Putin would have been right. We would have been divided.

NATO would not be strong. The EU would not be where it is all working collectively together to fight back the aggression of Vladimir Putin and Russia.

It is that unity is what put us there where we are today with Ukraine, which at the time no one thought we would be here a year later with Ukraine still standing. But it is the leadership and the strength that the Biden Administration showed in holding our allies together.

They were able to say that we’re going to stay and continue to give Ukrainians what they need until they win and we’re not going to make any decisions without the Ukrainians.

And I think that is what is extremely important to make sure that we follow that model even as we deal with China, which is why I do think that the chairman’s trip to South Korea, to Japan, and Taiwan similar to the trip that I did along with former Speaker Nancy Pelosi last year is important because we cannot just say we’re going to go at China by ourselves.

We need our allies and alliances together in the Indo-Pacific and Europe and Africa and Central and South America, in fact, indeed, around the world.

It has to be America leading other nations and not America alone. If you’re leading you have to lead somebody and bringing our folks together is what you do at the State Department and the men and women of the State Department who do a job every day. In fact, I say they are unheralded heroes and sheroes that we sometimes forget about.

So it is vital to our national security for the State Department to be adequately funded. It is also incumbent upon Congress to regularly pass authorization legislation for the State Department so that we can ensure that our diplomats have the tools they need to advance American interests around the world.
You know, under my chairmanship in the last Congress I’ve worked on a bipartisan basis to accomplish this, passing State Department authorization bills into law in both 2021 and 2022.

It was the first time in nearly two decades that such bills became law, and I know in working with Chairman McCaul we can continue that bipartisan work and make a State authorization as routine as the must pass NDAA is, and I hope we can make similar progress on authorizing foreign assistance and the U.S. Agency for International Development.

I do not see moving these types of bills as optional or as favors to the department or USAID. Rather, it is its core—it is core to our job as authorizes.

In discussions surrounding the budget I must admit that I am concerned by some of the extreme proposals emanating from the other side of the aisle that if implemented would threaten the United States’ capacity to carry out bold diplomacy and the development work that has impacted so many lives.

The across the board cuts that I hear coming from my colleagues on the other side of the aisle are arbitrary and counter to our most serious needs.

Some of these same extreme voices who claim in one breath that the Biden Administration is not doing enough to counter China with another breath advocate cutting the diplomatic and development budget necessary to out compete China.

Which is it? As President Biden famously said, “Don’t tell me what you value. Show me your budget and I’ll tell you what you value.”

If my colleagues truly want to address the rise of China, not to mention many other complex global challenges, cutting our diplomatic capacity and the funding of programs that strengthen American soft power is exactly the wrong way to do it.

You know, China has surpassed the United States in the number of diplomatic posts worldwide to 280 posts compared to our 275 and from 2013 to 2018 China doubled its diplomacy budget.

Moreover, this debate cannot focus only on China. United States must broaden our diplomatic footprint and expand our geopolitical presence and influence.

Our relationships around the world will be pivotal to meeting the global challenges we face whether it is Putin renewed aggression in Ukraine, the root causes of migration in Central and South America, the existential threat of climate change, pandemics, democratic backsliding, or human rights abuses around the world.

This committee has to consider all of that. That is our jurisdiction. The United States has a great role to play in shaping the world we live—we want to live in and we should utilize every opportunity to build coalitions of allies and partners who share our democratic values.

That’s who we are. If we once again adapt an America alone or America only foreign policy, our competitors and adversaries will fill that void by just opening it up for China or Russia.

We have a choice to make and this committee should make clear where it stands. Do we want to strengthen American global leadership or are we going to allow the extreme wing of the party—of the Republican Party—to weaken our national security?
Our State Department is vital to our national security. It makes Americans more secure and advances a more prosperous and stable world.

That is why ensuring the department has the funding it needs is so crucial and I hope we can work in a bipartisan manner to not only give our diplomats the tools they need to succeed but ensure the best individuals are being hired and promoted at State to represent our great nation around the world.

So I say that, Mr. Secretary, as you know, one of my top priorities has been to address inequities and disparities in career progression for officers belonging to historically excluded groups at the department and I am happy—I'm glad to see the steps that have been taken to address this issue.

But I know we can even do more and I hope the department will continue to make progress in improving equity and diversity within the institution.

On that note, let me thank you personally for the decision you announced yesterday to end the department's practice of issuing assignment restrictions as a condition on granting security clearances.

Many of us have been concerned for a decade about this unnecessary practice, which has caused harm to the careers of many employees simply because of their racial, ethnic, or national origin.

This was the right decision and I commend you for that. So, Secretary Blinken, let me again thank you for being here and I look forward to hearing your testimony and answers to what I know will be thoughtful questions from our members.

And let me last say to all that are here and particularly those who have lost their lives in Afghanistan, those doing the evacuation and for the 20 years I would hope that this committee will look at the entire 20 years—the entire 20 years—so that we can look and learn and make sure that mistakes that we have made we correct them, make sure that there's not one life of an American soldier and our allies because none of them, and I agree with the chairman on this, there's not a single life that was lost in vain.

We thank the men and women of our services and those who served in Afghanistan for their bravery, for standing, and for fighting for the interests of the United States of America.

We will never ever forget them. We will make sure that we work collectively together and I think this is one area that—you know, we have several veterans still on our committee. There is no greater service to our country than those that put their lives on the line to defend our country and we should never, ever, ever forget those and the families that have lost their loved ones in the line of duty and supporting the United States of America.

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

Chairman McCaul. The gentleman yields back. Well said.

Other members of the committee are reminded that opening statements may be submitted for the record.

We're pleased today to have the 71st Secretary of State, Antony Blinken, before us today. Your full statement will be made part of the record and we ask that you keep your remarks to 5 minutes.

I now recognize you, sir, the Secretary of State, for your opening statement.
Secretary Blinken, Mr. Chairman, thank you very, very much. To you, to Ranking Member Meeks, to all the members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to speak with you about the Administration's proposed Fiscal Year 1924 budget for the State Department and the Agency for International Development.

Let me say at the outset that I join both of you—I join every member of this committee in saluting all of our veterans of Afghanistan, saluting those who lost their lives, gave their lives, so that their fellow citizens could enjoy a greater measure of security, and particularly the presence of Sergeant Gee's mother here today.

I am humbled in your presence. I think of the 13. I think of the 2,402 Americans who lost their lives over 20 years in Afghanistan serving and protecting our country. I think of the 20,000-plus wounded and I think of so many others who served and have injuries of a different kind including members of my State Department team.

And I join you, Mr. Chairman, I join you, Ranking Member Meeks, I think I join every member of this committee in being determined that we look at—not only look but draw the lessons from 20 years, including the last year, in Afghanistan.

We do meet at an inflection point. The post-cold war world is over. There is an intense competition underway to determine what comes next. The United States has a positive vision for that future, a world that is free, that is open and secure, and is prosperous.

The budget that we put before you will, in our judgment, 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 that are distinct but also overlapping.

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

The second set is posed by a series of shared global tests including the climate crisis, migration, food and energy insecurity, pandemics, all of which directly impact the lives and the livelihoods of Americans and 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 2 years ago to address these challenges.

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

Our unmatched network of alliances and partnerships has grown stronger. In fact, they've never been stronger. We're expanding our presence in critical regions like the Indo-Pacific.

We are leading unprecedented coalitions including a number of new ones to confront aggression and to address humanitarian crises around the world. The President's Fiscal Year 1924 budget, the
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 out compete the PRC.

President Biden is firmly committed to advancing a free and open Indo-Pacific which is why this proposal asks for an 18 percent increase in our budget for that region over Fiscal Year 1923.

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

The budget will help us push back on advancing authoritarianism and democratic backsliding by strengthening democracies around the world, including for supporting independent media, countering corruption, 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.

The budget will allow us to continue leading the world in addressing some of these global challenges from food and energy insecurity to climate and health crises.

And on that last point, we're celebrating the 20th anniversary of PEPFAR, I think one of the greatest achievements in American foreign policy over the last decades.

It’s helped save 25 million lives around the world. 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.

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

I’m grateful for the progress that we have already made together including Congress’ support in updating the Secure Embassies Construction and Counterterrorism Act and Accountability Review Board to give us more flexibility to open new missions and to better manage the risks that our people face.

We know there’s more to do and we look forward to working with the Congress and this committee to accelerate modernization efforts so that the department can better attract, retain, as well as support our first-rate work force as they advance our interests in what is a very complex and fast-moving world.

Finally, the budget will further a personal priority for me that I know is shared by the leadership and members of this committee and that is supporting Enduring Welcome, our whole of government effort to resettle our Afghan allies. Keeping our promises to
those who serve the U.S. remains an unwavering priority. This budget will help us continue to make good on that commitment.

Mr. Chairman, when I began this role I committed to working to really restore the partnership between the executive branch and Congress when it comes to our foreign policymaking.

I’m determined to continue to work with you, the ranking member, the members of the committee to do that, and I very much look forward to the close coordination over the coming year.

Grateful for the chance to appear before you today and to answer any questions. Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Secretary Blinken follows:]
Chairman McCaul, Ranking Member Meeks, 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 two 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% 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 US
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.

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Chairman McCaul. Thank you, Mr. Secretary.

Let me just say we had a very powerful, compelling hearing on the events in Afghanistan at the end when the Abbey Gate was compromised and the suicide bomber went off and people were killed, and I think the American people deserve answers and they want people to be held accountable for that.

We haven't had a public hearing specifically on Afghanistan until the one we had just 2 weeks ago and we heard testimony that, quite frankly, I was not even aware of, that the suicide bomber was—that we had him in our sights.

The sniper had him and he could have been taken out and the threat could have been eliminated and lives could have been saved. This is why we have asked you for documents, and so I want to go through the document request we have made.

On January 12th I sent to you this letter requesting documents related to the Afghanistan withdrawal. We did not get that—at that time did not get that production. So on January 30th we requested three specific items to be delivered February 7th, most importantly the dissent cable.

As you know, 23 of our State Department officials at the embassy in Kabul took the extraordinary measure to raise their dissent to the policy, sir, that you and your Administration were effectuating.

I think the American people need to see this. We need to know what their dissent was. Why were they objecting to your policy in the failed withdrawal from Afghanistan?

Sent another letter on March the 3d and another one on March 20th. In fact, Chairman Meeks requested this dissent cable in an August 2021 letter that, again, no response.

Yet, here we are today. I do—the other—the after action report I want to thank you for that production and I know the Ambassador's after action review is going to be presented in 3 weeks.

But we need this dissent cable and I think the American people deserve to see it to know what in the world was going on in those critical weeks, especially after the testimony of Sergeant Tyler Vargas-Andrews. He deserves to know. Christy Shamblin deserves to know what the dissent was.

I have the subpoena. It's right here, and I'm prepared to serve this. Now we have had discussions and I think, you know, as a former Federal prosecutor you want to work things out.

But when you cannot you have to go forward with a subpoena, an arrest warrant, an indictment. So, sir, I'm going to give you until the close of business on Monday to produce that dissent cable to this committee and this Congress so the American people can see what the employees at the embassy in Kabul were thinking about your policy that they dissented from.

Do you have any response?

Secretary Blinken. Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

And, first, I want to make clear that we are working to provide all the information that this committee is looking for and that its oversight responsibilities give it the authority to secure, and as you noted we just produced the embassy action plan, thousands of pages that go along with that.
We’re committed to making available and sharing the substance of the after action review within the next 3 weeks and you heard that from the White House.

And as to the dissent channel cable I appreciate everything you’re saying and let me just put this very briefly in perspective for members of the committee who may not follow this.

This tradition of having a dissent channel is one that is cherished in the department and goes back decades. It’s a unique way for anyone in the department to speak truth to power as they see it without fear or favor and they do it by the regulations we established for these cables in a privileged and confidential way.

It is vital to me that we preserve the integrity of that process and of that channel, that we not take any steps that could have a chilling effect on the willingness of others to come forward in the future to express dissenting views on the policies that are being pursued.

I read every dissent channel cable that I get, I respond to every dissent channel cable that I get, and we factor into our thinking what we hear from colleagues who have a different view.

By our regulations these cables may only be shared with senior officials in the department and, again, that’s to protect the integrity of the process to make sure we do not have a chilling effect on those who might want to come forward, knowing that they will have their identities protected and that they can do so, again, without fear or favor.

Having said that, I very much understand and appreciate that there’s a real interest in the substance of that particular cable by this committee and in that spirit, following up on conversations that we have already had, again, we are prepared to make the relevant information in that cable available including through a briefing or some other mechanism.

So I’m determined to have our team followup, and, Mr. Chairman, as we have discussed, we’ll continue to work that in the coming days. I hope that we can reach an accommodation.

I really do understand and appreciate the importance of the substance of that information being shared with the committee and I hope we can find a way to do it that meets both of our needs.

Chairman McCaul. Well, I hope so, too.

The subpoena specifically asked for the dissent cable. I know it’s classified as well and I appreciate that, but I do want to mention your department cited then Secretary Henry Kissinger’s refusal to produce a dissent cable to Congress in the 1970’s as a precedent.

I would argue you do not have an executive privilege on this cable, and then we reached out to the author of that dissent cable, Ambassador Tom Boyatt, earlier this week. He said the reason that Henry Kissinger refused to release the cable was because it was so damaging, so damning.

Ambassador Boyatt is emphatic about the need for the State Department to produce dissent channel cables, and in a statement he provided to the committee he says that any claim providing by them to Congress that would have a chilling effect, as your staff has coined, is, and I quote him directly, “Bullshit.” Not my words. It's the Ambassador.
He writes, quote, “congressional oversight enhances executive responsibility and enables us to learn from the inevitable mistakes,” end of quote.

So I believe this committee and the American people after what happened—for God sakes after what happened in that dreadful August need to see this cable and, sir, we need you to respond, and if you fail I am prepared to serve you with a subpoena.

With that, I yield to the ranking member.

Mr. MECKS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

And let me just start off by saying that the chairman is correct that I did request on August 21st a copy of any and all dissent cables on Afghanistan dating back to 2017 and pledged to work with the department on timing and appropriate handling of the requested material.

However, I hope that the chairman also agrees that we should take care to avoid a chilling effect on employees, as you stated. Safe space for dissent is important ongoing, even as I hope the department works to accommodate this congressional request because I think the substance that is in the cable is tremendously important for members of this committee to know and that we do it in a classified session.

But I understand the protection of what you talk about as far as the members of the State Department so that they have their discretion.

But let me go now also to say thank you, Mr. Secretary, because we did have hearings on Afghanistan in the 117th Congress and the fact of the matter is you were the first to testify before this committee right after the pullout. You were the very first Cabinet official to do so right before this committee, and we had several other hearings in regards to Afghanistan in the 117th Congress.

But let me get to what we’re here for today. The President’s budget proposal lays out a strategic vision for the U.S. global engagement that would allow the United States to deepen our alliances, to tackle the most pressing global challenges, and effectively compete with our adversaries.

Speaker McCarthy and the House Republican majority have put forward a different vision, one that would cede American leadership on the world stage and threaten U.S. national security by arbitrarily slashing the international affairs budget by up to 22 percent.

Now, my colleague, Rosa DeLauro, had sent a letter to the agency requesting details on the projected impact of these cuts that the Republicans are proposing.

Let me ask a few questions on that because the department is saying that making cuts as deep as 22 percent on the international affairs budget would, among other things, and I quote, “Will it significantly scale back our efforts to counter aggressive and coercive tactics of the PRC and to implement the Indo-Pacific strategy?”

Is that correct? Yes or no, sir.

Secretary BLINKEN. That is correct.

Mr. MECKS. Would it reduce efforts to deter the PRC’s aggression and coercion, including through the Countering PRC Influence Fund and slow our ability to open new posts in the Pacific Islands? Secretary BLINKEN. Yes, it would.
Mr. MEEKS. Would it reduce assistance that is critical to enhancing military-to-military and to operability, training, cooperation, as well as fighting corruption and money laundering?

Secretary BLINKEN. Yes.

Mr. MEEKS. Would the treaty base commitments such as payment of U.S. assessments to international organizations would also be jeopardized?

Secretary BLINKEN. They would be.

Mr. MEEKS. You’d be required to impose a broad hiring freeze and, potentially, reductions in force while also rolling back training and professional development programs recently authorized in the State authorization bill on a bipartisan basis. Would that not be true?

Secretary BLINKEN. That is correct.

Mr. MEEKS. And to halt investments and security upgrades at our most vulnerable posts, increasing the physical risks to the U.S. Government personnel overseas?

Secretary BLINKEN. That is correct.

Mr. MEEKS. And to reduce support for ongoing programs that support an independent, democratic, politically stable, and economically viable Ukraine that can defend itself against external aggression. Would it not also do that, sir?

Secretary BLINKEN. That is correct.

Mr. MEEKS. And to reverse gains made to combat infectious diseases including through the President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief, programs to prevent material and childhood deaths and funds to support health workers and global health security. Is that not also true, sir?

Secretary BLINKEN. That is also true.

Mr. MEEKS. And the list goes on and on, does not it?

So I see I only have—in my limited time remaining have I missed anything else, Mr. Secretary? What are your greatest concerns if these draconian cuts were imposed on the State Department?

Secretary BLINKEN. I think across the board, when it comes to all of the priorities that I laid out in my opening statement to try to advance the security of the United States and American citizens around the world to strengthen even further our alliances and partnerships to deal with challenges coming from Russia and China, to deal effectively with the many transnational threats that are having a direct impact on the lives and livelihoods of Americans, to make sure that our own institution is as strong as it can be including from cyber threats, that our personnel are secure and safe even as we work to expand our footprint abroad across the board these cuts would have, in my judgment, devastating consequences and I’m happy as well to lay out in detail for members of this committee if it’s helpful what we see those consequences being.

Mr. MEEKS. Thank you, Mr. Secretary. I yield back.

Chairman McCaul. The chair recognizes gentleman from New Jersey, Mr. Smith.

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

I have four questions, Mr. Secretary, and welcome to the committee again.

Secretary BLINKEN. Thank you.
Mr. SMITH. The zero draft WHO pandemic treaty that the Administration and others are pushing to get—put into effect at the WHO starts off with a harsh criticism of the United States and the international community by calling it a catastrophic failure of international—of the community in showing solidarity and equity in response to the Coronavirus pandemic.

I've read the treaty. I'm concerned about it. Article 4 pays lip service to sovereignty and then has language that says, however, activities within their jurisdiction or control do not cause damage to their peoples and countries.

So, therefore, WHO would be empowered to step in, and we're talking about Tedros, a man who has been put into that position by the People's Republic of China. He was their candidate and, obviously, showed terrible, terrible judgment in the beginning and even to this day in recognizing the origins of the—of COVID–19.

Article 10 says that 20 percent—the United States would be obligated to provide 20 percent of our medical supplies, including tests, antiviral vaccines, and medications and the like to WHO for them. They say we want it. You have to give it by treaty obligation.

The sovereignty issue is the biggest, in my opinion. You're pushing for it. Next year is probably when it may get adopted. Will it be sent to the Senate for ratification or are you planning on using the executive agreement, which I think is a terrible way to do things, in order to go to the Senate for ratification?

Second, yesterday I chaired a hearing on Daniel Ortega's ever worsening dictatorship in Nicaragua and two—the day before, so that would be 2 days ago, EWTN journalist Owen Jensen asked John Kirby, “Are you aware of any efforts the U.S. is making to free Bishop Alvarez?” And as you know, he got 26 years in prison in what is Ortega's war on the Catholic Church.

Well, the spokesman, John Kirby, said, “I'm going to have to take the question and get back to you. I'm not tracking that particular case.”

I hope that wasn't a revelation of priorities. If you could speak to the issue of what Ortega is doing. We need to look at every type of pressure we could bring to bear. He just had the foreign minister of Iran to his country, as you know, to Managua—to the capital. So I hope you would speak to that.

Third, on Nigeria, I appeal again to you to redesignate them as a CPC country. As you know, the Commission on International Religious Freedom has called your decision inexplicable and it is the turning of the blind eye because more Christians have been killed in Nigeria and the government has done precious little to stop it, and over 17,000 churches destroyed.

I've been to several of those churches and saw firebombed churches from Boko Haram and others. So that—and finally on China, when you meet and talk with your counterparts in the PRC and the President himself, do you raise names in particular, like Gao Xijiang and others, because it's very important that they be front and center.

Secretary BLINKEN. Congressman, thank you very much. Good to see you again as well.
First, I'll try and be brief. We are not engaged in negotiating a COVID treaty. What we're engaged in is trying to strengthen the global architecture for dealing with pandemics and do it in a way that, for example, makes sure that if there's a next time, and I think there inevitably will be a next time, that countries actually are committed to transparency, to sharing information, to giving access to international inspectors, that we have the tools to do that and the countries agreed to that.

That’s, of course, not what China did in this instance and we have all paid a price for that. At the same time, I think what we clearly demonstrated is over the course of the pandemic the United States was the leading and most generous country in making sure that vaccines can be made available to those who needed them.

We did it through COVAX, we did it free of charge, we did it without political strings attached, and I can tell you, that has dramatically benefited our diplomacy and our standing in the world, especially in contrast to the way other countries have done this.

But we're happy to work with you on this and I take the points that you've raised. Bishop Alvarez is very much on my mind and on the mind of the State Department. As you know, the Nicaraguans expelled more than 200 political prisoners.

The good news, of course, is that they were freed from jail. The bad news is they cannot live in their own country and freely express themselves. I met with the leaders of the democratic opposition who were freed at the State Department, heard them and I—believe me, Bishop Alvarez should be released and we'll continue to work on that.

When it comes to Nigeria, I very much appreciate what you’ve said. We are working day in and day out standing up for the rights of persecuted religious minorities around the world. I think the report speaks for itself and speaks to why we do certain designations, why we do not do others. I'm happy to follow up with you offline.

And then on China, yes, absolutely we name names. I name names. I've gone over repeatedly with my counterparts in China the names of people who are being, in our judgment, detained for political reasons and who should be freed.

And at the same time, there are, of course, American citizens who remain unjustly detained. We are working on that every day.

Thank you.

Chairman McCaul. The gentleman yields.

The Secretary has till 1:30 p.m. so I'm going to hold members to their 5 minutes so we can get to all the members on the committee.

The chair now recognizes the gentleman from California, Mr. Sherman.

Mr. Sherman. The withdrawal from Afghanistan, of course, involved dissent. There were many people who said we should have left thousands of troops there.

Of course, once Trump told the American people we were leaving the American people would not stand for that. There has never been a pristine casualty-free withdrawal in that situation, especially when you have hundreds of thousands of people who are desperate to flee their country.
You saw that in our withdrawal from Vietnam and we saw that with the partition of India where hundreds of thousands of people moved or millions of people moved and hundreds of thousands died.

As to Iran, the chairman is correct that Iran is very, very close to a nuclear weapon, and I'll simply point out that the prior president pulled out of the JCPOA without a plan to do anything to stop Iran from having a nuclear weapon and so the Saudis seem to have taken action on the assumption that Iran was about to become a nuclear power.

Mr. Secretary, I want to implore you on an issue that may not otherwise come up. You're focused on the great issues of war and peace, the things historians will write about, and that competes for your time with the basic operations of the State Department—passports and visas.

The passport system is broken and has been since the beginning of COVID. Visas—if we did a better job on visas that would be the most important thing we could do with our public diplomacy program and winning hearts and minds.

And when it comes to business, it's impossible to get people to invest in America if it's going to take them 6 months to do a business deal and I would hope that business visas would proceed at the speed of private sector business.

So I want to implore you on that and move to a question. Last September Nord Stream pipelines were blown up. You're now in a formal setting. Can you assure the world that no agency of the U.S. Government blew up those pipelines or facilitated the——

Secretary BLINKEN. Yes, I can.

Mr. SHERMAN. Thank you. Putin has told us he wants to restore the Soviet Union. There are those who argue that we should have done nothing to help Ukraine, that what goes on in Ukraine stays in Ukraine and that we do not have an interest there.

Obviously, if we had announced we were doing nothing Europe would have done nothing and Putin might well have been in Kyiv in a week or two. If that had happened, I think President Xi would be emboldened.

But let's focus on Russia. If Russia had been able to take over the Ukraine in a matter of weeks would that have satiated Putin or encouraged him to go after Moldova, the Baltics, and Poland?

Secretary BLINKEN. In my judgment, the latter.

Mr. SHERMAN. Thank you.

Turning to Ethiopia, the State Department released a summary determination indicating that while all parties were guilty of war crimes the Ethiopian military, the Eritrean military, and the Amhara forces committed crimes against humanity and that the Amhara forces committed ethnic cleansing.

During testimony last year your assistant secretary, Molly Phee, committed that the United States will not support international loans or the restoration of AGOA to Ethiopia until the Ethiopian government fulfills its obligations under the peace agreement, including unrestricted humanitarian aid, protection for civilians, human rights monitoring, and the restoration of services, including the internet.

Do you reaffirm that commitment?
Secretary BLINKEN. I do, and, indeed, that’s actually what we’re seeing happening. I just came back from Ethiopia. Happy to address that in greater detail. But yes, the basic point. Yes.

Mr. SHERMAN. I thank you, and the head of Save the Children has just returned from there and reports that things are getting better.

Can you think of anything that would help President Xi expand his power more than if the United States were to cut our diplomatic efforts by 22 percent?

Secretary BLINKEN. There may be some other things but that would certainly be on a top five list.

Mr. SHERMAN. And, finally, what can we do to help the Rohingya who are so desperate they fled to Bangladesh? And some remain, of course, in Myanmar—Burma.

Secretary BLINKEN. As you know, I made a genocide determination when it comes to the Rohingya last year. We are doing everything we possibly can to continue to get humanitarian assistance into Burma, despite the situation there including to help Rohingya.

Of course, many Rohingya are refugees in other countries. We work to support them there. We work to make sure that countries do not engage in refoulement that would send them back.

Mr. SHERMAN. Thank you. And, finally, I just want to implore you to try to open up the corridor to Kherson. Thank you.

Secretary BLINKEN. Thank you.

Chairman McCaul. The gentleman yields.

Mr. WILSON. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

And the chairman is correct. There is an alliance of war criminal Putin invading Ukraine, the CCP threatening Taiwan, the rogue regime planning to vaporize Israel and then vaporize the United States.

Mr. Secretary, as—I agree with President Donald Trump that the surrender in Afghanistan was the most damaging foreign policy military decision in American history solely by the President of the United States, Mr. Biden.

I want to submit for the record letters I’ve sent to the Administration requesting correspondence the President claims to have had from top military officials who he blamed for the decision to surrender.

These letters remain unanswered. I look forward to your response as the State Department was in charge of the surrender.

Chairman McCaul. Without objection, so ordered.

[The information referred to follows:]
President Joseph R. Biden  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue  
Washington, D.C. 20500  

Dear President Biden,  

For months, I have been imploring the White House to heed military advice to maintain United States forces in Afghanistan to fight terrorists abroad and protect American families at home. The recent events in Kabul are devastating to our nation and allies, who continue to watch the situation unfold and share our goal of preventing Afghanistan from becoming a safe haven for murderous terrorists. As the Ranking Member of the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, it is my duty to stand with our allies that have sacrificed so much. I am grateful for our North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and NATO-aspiring countries for their response to Article V of the founding treaty.  

As a Member of Congress serving on both the House Armed Services Committee and House Foreign Affairs Committee, it is my constitutional duty to conduct oversight of U.S. military operations. During this afternoon’s press conference you stated, “The military, from the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs to the commanders in the field, have all contacted me, usually by letter, saying they subscribe to the mission as designated.”  

I request all correspondence you referenced during today’s press conference as it relates to the withdrawal of the United States from Afghanistan and the ongoing evacuation of U.S. citizens and allies by September 11, 2021. It is of the utmost importance that we safeguard Americans from terrorists and work towards peace through strength. As a 31-year veteran of the U.S. Army and the grateful dad of four sons who served in the Global War on Terrorism in Iraq, Egypt, and Afghanistan, I have faith in our military leaders.  

I look forward to your swift reply.  

Sincerely,  

Joe Wilson  
Member of Congress
Congress of the United States
House of Representatives

September 20, 2021

President Joseph R. Biden
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Biden,

I write today regarding a letter (attached) that I sent on August 26, 2021, regarding correspondence you mentioned in a press briefing relating to the withdrawal of Afghanistan. You stated, "The military, from the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs to the commanders in the field, have all contacted me, usually by letter, saying they subscribe to the mission as designed." I requested that you share that correspondence by September 11, 2021, and as of today, I still have not received a response.

As stated in my previous letter, it is my constitutional duty as a member of Congress on both the House Armed Services Committee and the House Foreign Affairs Committee to conduct appropriate oversight of U.S. military operations. Not only did I swear an oath to uphold my constitutional duties, I also have an obligation to my constituents to answer their questions and ensure that our government remains transparent and accountable to the American people.

I would appreciate your prompt attention to this matter. I look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

Joe Wilson
Member of Congress
November 15, 2021

President Joseph R. Biden
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Biden,

I write today regarding a letter (attached) that I sent on August 26, 2021, regarding correspondence you mentioned in a press briefing relating to the withdrawal of Afghanistan. You stated, "The military, from the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs to the commanders in the field, have all contacted me, usually by letter, saying they subscribe to the mission as designed." I requested that you share that correspondence by September 11, 2021, and as of today, I still have not received a response.

I would appreciate your prompt attention to this matter. I look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

Joe Wilson
Member of Congress
Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
January 21, 2022

President Joseph R. Biden
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Biden,

I am again requesting the correspondence you referenced during an August 26, 2021 press conference as it relates to military advice from your commanders about the withdrawal of U.S. forces from Afghanistan and the evacuation of U.S. citizens and Afghan allies. The original deadline was September 11, 2021. I am disappointed in your administration’s lack of communication over an issue so critical to Congress’ constitutional role of oversight of defense policy and foreign affairs.

In a closed Senate hearing, Operation Resolute Support (RS) Commander GEN Scott Miller testified that he opposed your administration’s decision to withdraw all U.S. forces, citing the threat posed by the Taliban.

In August, when asked whether any military commander had recommended keeping a residual force of 2,500 in Afghanistan, you responded, “No. No one said that to me that I can recall.” However, on September 29, 2021, Chairman Mark Milley and GEN Frank McKenzie both testified to the House Armed Services Committee that they had recommended to you to leave a residual troop presence.

The decision to withdraw all U.S. forces from Afghanistan regardless of conditions on the ground amounted to the worst U.S. foreign policy disaster in decades. As a Member of Congress serving on both the House Armed Services Committee (HASC) and House Foreign Affairs Committee (HFAC), it is my constitutional duty to demand transparency regarding the military advice you received and chose to disregard.

As a 31-year veteran of the U.S. Army and the grateful dad of four sons who served in the Global War on Terrorism in Iraq, Egypt, and Afghanistan, I have faith in our military leaders.

I look forward to your swift reply.

Sincerely,

Joe Wilson
Member of Congress
August 11, 2022

President Joseph R. Biden
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Ave NW
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear President Biden,

I am once again requesting the correspondence you referenced during an August 26, 2021 press conference as it relates to military advice from your commanders about the withdrawal of U.S. forces from Afghanistan and the evacuation of U.S. citizens and Afghan allies. During that press conference you stated that “The military, from the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, to the Joint Chiefs, to the commanders in the field, have all contacted me one way or another, usually by letter, saying we subscribe to the mission as designed.” The deadline in my original letter was September 11, 2021.

Almost a year has passed since the completed withdrawal of U.S. forces from Afghanistan and I continue to be disappointed in your administration’s lack of communication. As a member of both the House Committee on Armed Services and the House Committee on Foreign Affairs, this correspondence is critical for Congressional oversight of defense and foreign policy.

The decision to withdraw all U.S. forces from Afghanistan regardless of conditions on the ground amounted to the worst U.S. foreign policy disaster in decades. Just recently, Gen. McKenzie stated that “it haunts him to this day” that the U.S. was unable to get everyone out of Afghanistan, especially Afghans who assisted the U.S. When asked about who bears responsibility for the withdrawal, he asserted, “That was a national decision made by the president, and we executed that decision.”

As a 31-year veteran of the U.S. Army and the grateful dad of four sons who served in the Global War on Terrorism in Iraq, Egypt, and Afghanistan, I have faith in our military leaders.

I look forward to your swift reply.

Sincerely,

Joe Wilson
Member of Congress
February 17, 2023

President Joseph R. Biden
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear President Biden,

It has been nearly 17 months since the disastrous withdrawal of U.S. Forces and the evacuation of American citizens and Afghan allies from Afghanistan. I am once again requesting the correspondence that you referenced during an August 26, 2021, press conference as it relates to military advice from your commanders about the withdrawal. The deadline from my original letter sent to you on August 26, 2021, was for September 11, 2021.

As a member of Congress serving on both the House Armed Services Committee and the House Foreign Affairs Committee, this correspondence is critical for Congressional oversight of defense and foreign policy. I continue to be disappointed in the lack of communication and lack of accountability from your administration on this matter. The decision to withdraw all U.S. forces from Afghanistan regardless of conditions on the ground was a tragedy and amounted to the worst U.S. foreign policy disaster in decades.

The lives of 13 brave U.S. service members and over 150 innocent Afghans were lost due to the hasty withdrawal which was against the advice of senior military officials. Additionally, this tragic evacuation tarnished America’s credibility with our partners and allies. The requested correspondence will provide transparency and establish accountability for this dreadful event in our nation’s history that left hundreds of Americans and tens of thousands of Afghan partners behind.

As a 31-year veteran of the U.S. Army and the grateful dad of four sons who served in the Global War on Terrorism in Iraq, Egypt, and Afghanistan, I have faith in our military leaders and their professional advice.

I look forward to your swift reply.

Sincerely,

[Signature]

Joe Wilson
Member of Congress
Mr. WILSON. Additionally, as the grateful father of Hunter Wilson, an Afghan veteran, I appreciate so much the Americans who have served to protect America since 9/11 and particularly always in mind the 13 who were murdered at Abbey Gate.

With that in mind, Mr. Secretary, how many American citizens and licensed permanent residents are in Afghanistan today and are any of them currently being held hostage by the Taliban?

Secretary BLINKEN. Congressman, there are several Americans who are being detained by the Taliban. We are working to secure their freedom. The families have asked that we protect their identities and do not speak publicly to their cases.

Mr. WILSON. Now, those are being detained. How many other Americans are——

Secretary BLINKEN. How many other Americans? There are approximately—let me put it this way. Since August 31st of last year we have helped about 975 American citizens who wished to leave Afghanistan do so.

As we speak, Americans who identify themselves as American citizens who identify themselves to us who are in Afghanistan—some of whom had been there since the withdrawal, some of whom went back to Afghanistan—there are about—that we're in contact with about 175. Forty-four of them are ready to leave and we are working to effectuate their departure.

Mr. WILSON. Well, their security is just so important for the American people and I urge everything. But, again, it's just inex- cusable, the surrender and the consequence of the invasion of Ukraine, the threats to Taiwan, the threats of vaporization of the people of Israel and America because of, sadly, the weakness that has been displayed.

Additionally——

Secretary BLINKEN. I see this very differently, Congressman. I see us ending America's longest war. I think that's a good thing for the United States. It freed up our ability to devote—focus and resources on Ukraine——

Mr. WILSON. Well, I—Mr. Secretary——

Secretary BLINKEN [continuing]. To deal with rise of China.

Mr. WILSON. Mr. Secretary, we are in a global war on terrorism. It is not over, and by allowing safe havens in Afghanistan you're putting the American people at risk.

It's my understanding there are now 27 terrorist organizations actively working. We already know Osama bin Laden operated out of a cave in Afghanistan. We do not need to learn—we do not need to learn that again.

Secretary BLINKEN. Osama bin Laden was brought to justice more than a decade ago, as you know, we took out the leader in Afghanistan, the successor leader of al-Qaeda, Mr. Zawahiri.

We took out a leading financier in Somalia who was helping to finance any return of al-Qaeda in Afghanistan. We demonstrated the ability to continue to——

Mr. WILSON. But it still does not address—you created——

Secretary BLINKEN [continuing]. Go at those who would do us harm.
Mr. WILSON. You’ve created a safe haven in Afghanistan. I mean, it’s inconceivable, and President Trump was correct. Bagram should have never been abandoned.

With that in mind, the Administration has been inexcusable in its delay providing weapon systems defensive to Ukraine. In fact, the long-range missiles that could be provided have been delayed. These could be so helpful because they could destroy the Iranian drones that are currently located illegally, obviously, in Crimea.

And so what is being done to release the latest equipment to stop—let’s stop a war. We can do that by providing proper defensive equipment.

Secretary BLINKEN. Congressman, I share absolutely your commitment to make sure that we’re getting the Ukrainians what they need when they need it to deal with the Russian aggression.

That’s what we have done going back before day one, including draw downs of equipment in September before the aggression, in December before the aggression, to make sure that they actually had in hand what they needed to repel it if it came, including Stingers and Javelin. So the fact—the allegation that we were not doing that is simply wrong.

Second, every step along the way we have worked and led an international coalition of more than 50 countries, the Secretary of Defense putting together a remarkable process in Ramstein, Germany, to rally these countries to provide along with us——

Mr. WILSON. Hey, as we conclude, I want to quote, of all things, the Washington Post, March 10. Had a lead editorial that the legacy of the President and you will be whether we have success and that is expelling Putin, a war criminal, from Ukraine. That is victory, expelling him and his murderers from Ukraine.

With that, I yield back.

Secretary BLINKEN. Thank you.

Chairman McCaul. The gentleman yields.

The gentleman from Virginia is recognized, Mr. Connolly.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and welcome, Secretary Blinken.

Listening to my friends on the other side, especially the opening statement of the chairman, I’m reminded of the line in the “Wizard of Oz,” lions and tigers and bears, oh, my, because apparently you have singlehandedly left the world in a mess. There’s no historic context.

So I want to ask a series of questions to try to get my mind around the history behind things. So, for example, the chairman mentioned Iran is about to become a nuclear power. Oh, my. How could that happen?

Well, Mr. Secretary, was there an agreement, I do not know, anywhere that actually pushed back the nuclear development in Iran and in fact was working in all respects in terms of metrics?

Secretary BLINKEN. There was. It was called the JCPOA and it put Iran’s nuclear program in a box as verified not only by international inspectors but by our own intelligence community.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Ahh, I remember that now and I seem to recall my friends on the other side of the aisle opposed it. And then what happened to that agreement that was working?
Secretary BLINKEN. The previous Administration decided to leave the agreement.
Mr. CONNOLLY. I'm sorry, Mr. Secretary. Couldn't hear that.
Secretary BLINKEN. Yes. The previous Administration decided to leave the agreement.
Mr. CONNOLLY. The Trump Administration?
Secretary BLINKEN. That's correct.
Mr. CONNOLLY. Ahh, OK. My, my.
Afghanistan—I mean, terrible thing that happened in August 2021. But did it have any antecedent? For example, was there anybody who said, we're going to negotiate in Doha with the Taliban and we're going to actually exclude the government of Afghanistan we're allegedly supporting? Did that happen?
Secretary BLINKEN. The previous Administration had a negotiated agreement with the Taliban that called for the withdrawal of all American forces from Afghanistan by May 31st of 2021, released 5,000 Taliban prisoners and——
Mr. CONNOLLY. Oh, those terrorists that Mr. Wilson was concerned about.
Secretary BLINKEN. In addition, drew down our own forces over time to 2,500——
Mr. CONNOLLY. Oh, my goodness.
Secretary BLINKEN [continuing]. When the present Administration took office.
Mr. CONNOLLY. And that was also—was that the Biden Administration?
Secretary BLINKEN. As I said, that was the previous Administration.
Mr. CONNOLLY. Well, I'm sorry. Did that have a name?
Secretary BLINKEN. The Trump Administration.
Mr. CONNOLLY. Trump Administration. Thank you. OK.
Was there a president of the United States who said that he believed the word of, you know, a sociopath, Vladimir Putin, over his own intelligence community with respect to Russian interference in American elections? Did that happen?
Secretary BLINKEN. I recall press accounts to that to that effect, yes.
Mr. CONNOLLY. And did that president have a name?
Secretary BLINKEN. I believe that was President Trump.
Mr. CONNOLLY. Was there a president who denied Javelins, a critical part of the arsenal for Ukraine to defend itself before the war that began last February and March, over a political issue, trying to get dirt on a political opponent? Did that happen?
Secretary BLINKEN. Based on press accounts and testimony before Congress I believe that it did, yes.
Mr. CONNOLLY. And who was that?
Secretary BLINKEN. That was the previous president, President Trump.
Mr. CONNOLLY. President Trump. Was there a president who disparaged anyone that said it was obsolete and we probably do not really need it anymore? Any president ever say that in the history of—since the founding 73 years ago of NATO?
Secretary BLINKEN. Based on public statements that I've read, yes, I believe that President Trump said that.
Mr. CONNOLLY. And from your point of view as the Secretary—current Secretary is NATO playing any kind of nonobsolete role in the current war in Europe?

Secretary BLINKEN. NATO is playing an absolutely essential vital role in ensuring the security of Europe and deterring further aggression by Russia against Europe.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Most of us kind of find—you know, we’re worried about the climate. Was there any kind of, I do not know, international agreement on the climate accord that had every nation on Earth as a member except for two?

Secretary BLINKEN. That would be the Paris Agreement.

Mr. CONNOLLY. And what happened to that?

Secretary BLINKEN. The United States at one point withdrew from the Paris Agreement. President Biden reengaged us in Paris.

Mr. CONNOLLY. And again, Mr. Blinken, did that President who withdrew from the Paris Climate Accord that had all countries on Earth but two, who—what was the name of that president who withdrew us from that?

Secretary BLINKEN. Again, in this case the Trump Administration withdrew from that agreement.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Well, I just say there might be—we might all have cause to say lions, tigers, and bears, oh my, but it ain’t about the Biden policies. It’s about the previous Administration that left a mess and that cost lives because of the decisions made or not made with respect to relations across the board.

I yield back.

Chairman MCCAUL. The gentleman yields.

We appreciate that performance. It was quite entertaining. The chair now recognizes——

Mr. CONNOLLY. I would just say to the chairman with respect I did not mean for it to be entertaining.

Chairman MCCAUL. Yes, right.

Mr. CONNOLLY. I meant for it to be——

Chairman MCCAUL. The chair recognizes Mr. Perry——

Mr. CONNOLLY [continuing]. To be a statement of history.

Mr. MEEKS. It was factual. It was factual.

Chairman MCCAUL. Mr. Perry?

Mr. PERRY. I thank the Chairman.

Mr. Secretary, we’re honored by your presence. I just note from your resume you’ve been at this a long time. Just went from 1994 to the present. You’ve been at the State Department, National Security Council, Center for Strategic and International Studies, State—correction, you were director of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Deputy Assistant to the President of the United States for national security, adviser to the Vice President, deputy national security adviser, deputy Secretary of State and of course, now the Secretary of State.

So you got a lot of experience. Do you consider the Wuhan Institute of Virology as a civilian institution as it presents itself to be?

Secretary BLINKEN. Congressmen, particularly in China, institutions that present themselves as civilian in practice are usually organs of the State and in any event even when they are on paper private answer to the State.

Mr. PERRY. So does that mean you——
Secretary BLINKEN. In the particular instance of Wuhan, I cannot speak directly to it except to say that in a sense it does not matter because they answer to the State.

Mr. PERRY. Well, OK. So in 2005 when you were director of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee did you know that China was not in compliance with the chemical and bioweapons treaty obligations for which it was supposed to comply?

Secretary BLINKEN. We have had concerns over many years about the compliance of a number countries including China.

Mr. PERRY. That’s not the question I asked you. Were you aware that they were not in compliance. It is 2005. I mean, I just kind of went through your resume here a little bit. I mean, you were deeply in at that point. Were you aware? Did you know?

Secretary BLINKEN. I would have to go back and look. That’s almost 20 years ago. I cannot tell you at that particular point in time.

Mr. PERRY. Do you know now?

Secretary BLINKEN. We have real concerns about the compliance——

Mr. PERRY. I know you have concerns. I’m asking if you know.

Secretary BLINKEN. I’m telling you that we have—that we have real concerns about their compliance, the compliance——

Mr. PERRY. So are they in compliance or aren’t they?

Secretary BLINKEN. So this is something that we can take up in a different setting. But we have real concerns about compliance.

Mr. PERRY. Did you know about China’s offensive biological weapons program and the CTP’s Academy of Military Medical Sciences?

Secretary BLINKEN. I cannot speak to individual institutions and I would have to go back and look to the——

Mr. PERRY. Sir, you’re the Secretary of State. This is important stuff. You cannot tell if the CCP is currently complying with the bioweapons treaty obligations. You cannot tell us whether you know about China’s offensive biological weapons program.

Are you familiar with the fact that the Academy of Military Medical Sciences worked with the Wuhan Institute of Virology who received money from the United States of America, particularly the State Department, the Defense Department, the USAID, the NIH? Are you familiar with that?

Secretary BLINKEN. As I said, Congressman, I’m familiar with the fact that as a practical matter there is little difference between purportedly private organizations and the State, and the fact that there was collaboration or would be collaboration between this particular institute and the State, including the Chinese military, is certainly no surprise.

By the way, one of the reasons——

Mr. PERRY. OK. So——

Secretary BLINKEN. One of the reasons it’s particularly helpful that we actually have programs to give us——

Mr. PERRY. Are you familiar with the fact that——

Secretary BLINKEN [continuing]. Eyes and ears into the Chinese CDC and into places like Wuhan——

Mr. PERRY. Sir——
Secretary BLINKEN [continuing]. Precisely to have a better understanding of what’s going on.

Mr. PERRY. I know you want to understand. I know you’re concerned. Are you familiar with the fact that the Chinese Communist Party announced that they were collaborating on chimeric viruses and that the CCP declared Coronaviruses were the leading edge of genetic weapons warfare? Do you know that?

Secretary BLINKEN. Again——

Mr. PERRY. You’re the Secretary of State.

Secretary BLINKEN. I’m happy to look at each of those statements, the documentation behind them. I cannot speak to the specifics. I can tell you that, again, we have had for a long time, continue to have, real concerns about compliance from China with biological weapon production and chemical weapon production.

Mr. PERRY. I know you have concerns, sir. Do you know that—during your time—during your time, sir, in all these lofty positions contracts, including ones with the State—the Department of State, DoD, USAID, et cetera, paid for research at the Wuhan Institute of Virology and the Academy of Military Medical Sciences, and there were reports that the CCP may have double billed the U.S., since we have declared that the CCP has an illicit bioweapons program should American taxpayers be funding this, No. 1?

No. 2, should we trust that China will do the right thing in its part with this WHO-proposed convention?

Secretary BLINKEN. We should not trust. We should verify that that’s exactly what——

Mr. PERRY. What about paying? Should the American taxpayers pay for this?

Secretary BLINKEN. I’m not sure what the this is, Congressman.

Mr. PERRY. The research at the Wuhan Institute of Virology in collaboration with the Academy of Military Medical Sciences for biological weapons.

Secretary BLINKEN. We’re not—we’re not paying for that. As I said, in the past we have had programs where our scientists as well as our embassy have had the ability to have eyes and ears in some of these places precisely so that we would have a better understanding of what was going on and, in particular, to see if there were any safety or security concerns.

There was one program that was before my time that ended in 2019 that USAID was engaged in that—as I said, that program ended in 2019. It wasn’t involved in so-called gain of function research.

But as a general proposition the benefit of these programs is to give us greater visibility on what’s going on in places that we otherwise do not have eyes and ears on.

Mr. PERRY. Thank you, Mr. Secretary. I yield, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman McCaul. The gentleman yields.

Mr. Keating?

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

There’s not a hotspot, seems to me, in the world that you haven’t been at since you assumed this office and I want to personally
thank you for your personal commitment, your family’s sacrifice—clearly, in the tradition of your late father—for all this work.

I want to thank you, too, for your work trying to help Paul Whelan, who will be this month spending his 53d birthday in a Russian work camp, 4 years wrongfully detained by the Russian Federation and Vladimir Putin.

So, Mr. Secretary, I’m holding in my hand a memo—a letter from the Russian Federation dated February 17th, 2022, and that’s 7 days before Putin unleashed approximately 190,000 of his troops that were amassed on the Ukraine border with an effort to overtake Ukraine’s capital, topple its government, set up a puppet government, and control Ukraine. I assume you’re aware of this letter. It’s an important letter because it makes clear what Putin’s military demands were and they go far beyond Ukraine right in this memorandum, right in this letter.

Putin made no bones about the fact what his military demands were as he was prepared to amass these troops. His demands were that he would take measures necessary if things did not change beyond Ukraine.

In fact, he wanted to unwind the clock of history back to reinstating Soviet like era boundaries and restrictions and he wanted to effectively disarm one-half of NATO, particularly the areas that are most vulnerable in the Baltic States.

So here it is in black and white, and if we fail in assisting Ukraine to defend itself we know what’s next and we know what the U.S. will honor in its Article 5 commitments should he do what he’s threatened to do here if he did not have his demands met and that means if need be deploying American troops on the ground as we’re required to, as President Biden has reaffirmed and President Obama has reaffirmed and President Bush has reaffirmed and every Republican and Democratic presidents after Bush has reaffirmed since this was relevant.

And is it clear to you, Mr. Secretary, we will do everything we do—that Article 5 concerns including, if necessary, troops on the ground?

Secretary BLINKEN. The President has made that absolutely clear.

Mr. KEATING. I say that because there are voices in this country right now, including voices seeking to be commander in chief in this country, that say that a mere phone call to Vladimir Putin and an agreement to seize all that territory that was illegally garnered by Russia through war crimes, through horrors that are unspeakable, the type of things that we haven’t seen in Europe since the 1930’s, but merely cede that away and walk away from our obligation.

And there are other voices, too, voices dismissing the actions that Putin has taken—illegal horrific actions—and merely calling them a territorial dispute that the U.S. has no play in.

We have to be aware of what’s next. We have to be aware where we stand in this terrible time in history. We do not stand alone, fortunately, because of the commitment of President Biden and yourself and others to put together a coalition that Putin thought was unattainable because it was necessary. We couldn’t win by ourselves.
So this coalition is in place and what we—what stands in our way is not just defending Ukraine's interest, not just defending NATO's interests, not just defending Europe's interest, but defending the U.S. self-interest, and that's the point of our involvement in Ukraine.

And here it is in black and white, Putin's declaring exactly what it was. Let's not fail to acknowledge what he himself wants. And I yield back.

Chairman McCaul. The gentleman yields.
The chair recognizes Mr. Issa.
Mr. Issa. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.
Mr. Secretary, well, we'll kind of look backward and forwards.
Next month you'll mark your 61st birthday and——
Secretary Blinken. Don't remind me.
Mr. Issa. Well, you know, at my age, you know, I'm jealous.
But, Mr. Secretary, you're one of the most qualified secretaries during my tenure. You have spent a very long time learning history and being prepared to not repeat it. So I'm going to give you just a couple of names—Saigon, Tehran, Benghazi, Tripoli, and Kabul.

Each one of those to most people in the State Department represent a failure to smoothly withdraw, a failure to anticipate, and the like.

Now, the chairman had a fairly lengthy discussion with you about what the committee wants and needs in order to do its oversight and in a very Kissinger like way you gave answers not to his questions but answers that were the ones that you came here prepared to give.

Mr. Secretary, I have with me—you'll recognize it—this is what your discovery looks like often. This is actual discovery from the State Department.

I might suggest to you after our mutual many years of doing this that your best choice is accommodation when appropriate, compliance when a subpoena comes, which means that this sort of redaction cannot and shall not be accepted by Congress once a subpoena is issued.

I might also suggest that if you deliver something under the cloak of being secret or top secret that redaction is, by definition, inappropriate, that, in fact, if we view in camera redaction is inappropriate. If today you can make the commitment that when the accommodations to this and other committees, but particularly this committee—when the accommodation is that we receive information in some in camera form that it be delivered sooner, not later, and redacted only for actual claimed privileges—if you can make that commitment I think the chairman can rest assured that we will not be getting what I sometimes call a black cow eating a licorice at midnight.

Secretary Blinken. Thank you, Congressman. I appreciate that.

What I can commit to is this. I can commit, as I have committed to the chairman, to find a way to make sure that this committee gets the information that it rightly needs to conduct its oversight and I need to do that in a way that, of course, as I said in the case of the dissent channel cable protects the integrity of that process but making sure that you get the information.
More broadly when it comes to documents, of course, we have national security considerations. There may be legal considerations. But I take the point that you're making. I want to make sure that you get the information and that information is not——

Mr. Issa. Mr. Secretary, since you've sat behind the us, the senators, and you've been on the other side, you're well aware that this coequal body determines what it believes it needs to be seen, and with the exception of actual stated privileges the court, if we have to go that far, makes it very clear that, in fact, we determine, not you, what our legislative needs and need to know is.

So I might suggest that although that answer, again, in a very Kissinger-esque, I appreciate it.

Secretary Blinken. I'll take that as a compliment.

Mr. Issa. It is. But please put the other hat on that you wore when you sat on this side of the dais and recognize that the accommodation of sooner rather than later in camera, if the chairman and the committee agree to it, allows us to then debate the smaller portion that might need to be made public or in some other way disseminated.

I'd like to take an opportunity, because the world is listening, to speak past you for a moment, Mr. Secretary. The people who wrote the dissent cable are free to come to this committee, free to come to our staff and free to come to the chairman as legitimate whistleblowers to be fully protected, and if they come forward and produce their names then I submit to you that at that point the statement you made here today is moot—that, in fact, any member of the State Department who comes forward as a whistleblower on behalf of dissent of any sort leading up to the failed withdrawal from Kabul would be taken as a waiver of that history that we noted all the way back with the not late and in good health in New York, Henry Kissinger.

And with that, Mr. Chairman, I thank you and yield back.

Chairman McCaul. The gentleman yields.

The chair now recognizes Mr. Cicilline.

Mr. Cicilline. Thank you, Mr. Secretary, for being with us today, and I think we all owe you and the men and women of the State Department a great deal for the work that you do every single day and I want to thank you personally for that.

Over the past 2 years the Biden Administration has reestablished U.S. leadership on the global stage, deepening our strategic alliances and advancing our values and interests, and I really am grateful for Mr. Connolly’s recitation. I was sitting here listening to some of my Republican colleagues and wondering did they miss the last 4 years.

Did you, in fact, inherit an agreement by the prior Administration to withdraw from Afghanistan by a date certain and that also included the release of 5,000 Taliban fighters from prison?

Secretary Blinken. That’s correct.

Mr. Cicilline. Did you, in fact, inherit a decision from the prior Administration to withdraw from the JCPOA that had kept Iran’s nuclear program in check?

Secretary Blinken. That is correct.

Mr. Cicilline. And you inherited a departure from the Paris Climate Accord?
Secretary BLINKEN. That’s right.
Mr. CICILLINE. You also followed and Administration that under-
mined the importance of NATO?
Secretary BLINKEN. Well, that’s a question of judgment.
Mr. CICILLINE. The prior president, President Trump, made pub-
lic statements about the obsolescence of NATO, correct?
Secretary BLINKEN. I believe that’s correct. Yes.
Mr. CICILLINE. And now they’ve proposed a budget that would
decimate the development and diplomatic budget by up to 22 per-
cent. Is that correct?
Secretary BLINKEN. We have shared our concerns about proposed
cuts to the budget proposal.
Mr. CICILLINE. And I do not remember hearing from my Repub-
lican colleagues on this committee criticize any of those five events.
And so it’s rich to hear today this, as I think Mr. Connolly said,
lions and tigers and bears, oh, my.
So I want to ask you, Secretary Blinken, first, with respect to the
U.S. obligations in multilateral organizations and peacekeeping en-
tities, how do you assess the damage that is caused to U.S. credi-
bility by our failing to stay current with our obligations and if Con-
gress were to grant the requested funds and authorities, how would
the U.S. be able to change the dynamics in these institutions in our
favor and in the advancement of the national security interests of
the United States?
Secretary BLINKEN. Congressman, thank you for raising that.
I think it’s an important point because we find ourselves in a—
almost contorted ourselves in that we are by far the largest contrib-
utor to most of the programs in these organizations and, yet, pre-
cisely because we find ourselves in some instances in arrears, our
competitors, our adversaries point to that to say that we’re actually
not doing our part. We’re not serious about those organizations.
So it actually undermines our standing and undermines our di-
plomacy. It’s something we constantly have to correct, and I think
that could be easily rectified by simply making sure that we’re cur-
rent with our obligations.
Mr. CICILLINE. Thank you.
Mr. Secretary, earlier this week I traveled to the United Nations
in New York to attend the second ever Arria-formula meeting at
the U.N. Security Council to focus on the specific vulnerabilities of
LGBTQI+ persons and, particularly, we heard about an increase in
violence and anti-LGBTQI+ rhetoric and legislation throughout the
continent of Africa.
Can you just speak to what you are doing, what the embassies
are doing, in terms of staff and resources and coordination to con-
front these threats and what Congress can do to help in that effort?
Secretary BLINKEN. Thank you. This is a deep concern of ours.
We have seen that marginalized groups, particularly the LGBTQI+
community in many countries, is under increased threat and in-
creased siege. In fact, as you—I think you know, we put out just
this week and I put out personally our annual Human Rights Re-
port and one of the things that it documents is precisely that.
So we’re very much engaged around the world in a variety of
ways in trying to make sure that we are advocating, encouraging,
pressing countries to uphold the rights of all marginalized commu-
nities, including the LGBTQI+ community, and that they are in the first instance, of course, protecting and defending those rights and in the second instance not taking measures that would further undermine those rights.

We do it in different ways in different places. We try to make sure that we’re both sensitive to local considerations because we want to be as effective as we can be. So sometimes it’s private. Sometimes it’s public. Sometimes it’s a combination of both.

But our embassies are seized with this and this really goes to, I think, a core tenet of view that I believe many Americans share, which is that all democracies are strengthened by protecting vulnerable populations, whatever they may be.

We’re equally engaged on pushing back against the persecution of religious minorities around the world. We see that, too, as a huge problem.

Mr. Cicilline. Thank you, Mr. Secretary.

Finally, Turkey’s use of its existing F–16 fleet to challenge Greek sovereignty and its refusal to rule out using upgraded F–16s to do so and continue to violate Greek territorial airspace undermines NATO unity, and I know that’s an important priority for you.

Would you speak to what steps the Administration is taking to ensure that American weapons are not used to threaten allies and partners in Greece, Cyprus, and northern Syria?

Secretary Blinken. Thank you, Congressman.

The focus of our efforts, whether it’s with Turkey, whether it’s with Greece, whether it’s with any other NATO ally, is to make sure that they have the equipment and technology that they need to be fully interoperable with NATO, to make sure that they can do everything that they need to do as a NATO ally, while at the same time, of course, ensuring that to the extent there are any disputes between them that any equipment or technology we provide is not used in furtherance of those differences or those disputes.

So that’s, certainly, the case. We believe that Turkey should get the upgraded F–16s and the modernization package for their existing F–16s. We think it’s important to NATO, important to the alliance.

At the same time we are working assiduously to try to ensure that any tensions that exist between NATO allies, in this case Greece and Turkey, are abated and end and that they do not engage in either actions or rhetoric that would inflame the situation.

So I was just in both Turkey and Greece. Of course, Turkey had the devastating mind-boggling earthquake. Shortly after I was in Greece we had the horrific train accident. Our hearts and our hands, actually, are going to try to help both countries in both situations.

But, at the same time, we want to make sure——

Mr. Mast [presiding]. The gentleman’s time has expired.

Secretary Blinken [continuing]. Tensions in the eastern Mediterranean——

Mr. Mast. The chair now recognizes the vice chair of the full committee, Mrs. Wagner.

Mrs. Wagner. I thank you, Mr. Chairman, and I thank you, Secretary Blinken, for your service and your time today.
Mr. Secretary, yesterday the House passed the Taiwan Assurance Implementation Act. This is my bipartisan legislation I worked on with Mr. Connolly and others that requires the State Department to provide robust reporting on engagement with Taiwan and ask that the U.S. remove self-imposed barriers to engagement.

I am urging my colleagues in the Senate to take up my legislation and send it to the President’s desk so we can work toward tangible and sustained progress in the U.S.-Taiwan relationship.

The United States must demonstrate resolute and unflinching support for this important democratic partner as it faces increased bullying and coercion by the People’s Republic of China.

In the meantime, I hope that you will help us understand how the State Department’s budget will move this critical partnership in the right direction because I am worried, frankly, that State’s current approach is overly concerned with avoiding even the slightest chance of offending Beijing.

Mr. Secretary, I hope that we can all agree that our confrontation with China represents a generational challenge for the United States and its partners. However, I was concerned to see so little priority given to U.S. arms sales and other security assistance programs in the Indo-Pacific.

If the Indo-Pacific is the decisive theater why is foreign military financing for East Asia and the Pacific third in priority with only 2 percent of the proposed funding going toward the region?

Secretary BLINKEN. First of all, thank you, and I appreciate your focus on this. I look forward to reading what you’ve put forward.

Let me mention just quickly, by the way, that at the beginning of this Administration we liberalized our contact guidance when it comes to our engagement with Taiwan precisely to make sure that U.S. engagement with Taiwan better reflects the broadening, deepening unofficial relations that we have and that guidance has been out for nearly 2 years.

When it comes to the foreign military financing, sales, et cetera, just to focus on Taiwan for a second then we can broaden out, I have signed more of these agreements than any previous Secretary of State and in the last couple of years we have provided for an additional $5 billion in defense-related sales to Taiwan. This builds on a long record going back over many Administrations.

Mrs. WAGNER. But, yet, that foreign aid—the weapons are not making it to Taiwan.

Secretary BLINKEN. Well, so you have—there you have an important point and the challenge that we’re facing across the board lies not with my department even as we work to streamline everything that we’re doing.

And as I said, I signed out more of these than any previous secretary. We have real production challenges across the board, production challenges that have built up over many years as various lines have gone dormant, COVID, supply chain problems.

All of these things have come to a head. That’s exactly what the Defense Department and industry are working on right now and my anticipation is you’re going to see significant progress on that.

But it’s not for want of trying to make sure that all of our partners——
Mrs. Wagner. But time is of the essence, Mr. Secretary. It truly is, and a situation and the confrontation that could occur between China and Taiwan and our other partners is before us.

In the most recent National Defense Authorization Act, Congress authorized up to $2 billion in this foreign military funding grants to Taiwan for each of fiscal years 2023 through 2027, which would allow the United States and Taiwan to engage in joint long-term planning for the acquisition, deployment, and sustainment of critical capabilities.

Why is Taiwan not a priority for funding or attention in FMF?

Secretary Blinken. Taiwan is a priority and, as you know, we have many different ways of doing this. So we appreciate the authority. We put together in the budget a new fund to look at emerging priorities for FMF. Taiwan would be included in that.

At the same time, in the case of Taiwan the most effective way to date to make sure that they have what they need to defend themselves has been through the foreign military sales program. They increased their defense budget by 11 percent.

They have the capabilities, the capacity, to make the acquisitions they need, and at the same time we have been working very closely with them in terms of the advice that we’re providing to make sure that they have an effective deterrent and defense capacity.

Sometimes that goes to significant weapon systems. Sometimes that goes to very different things that may not be the most expensive or flashiest——

Mrs. Wagner. And I thank you for that, and I do have some additional questions that I will submit for the record. But I do submit to you our very bipartisan Taiwan Assurance Implementation Act that was passed the House last night I hope that the State Department under your leadership will take a very clear look at this. It is important as we move forward——

Secretary Blinken. We will. We will.

Mrs. Wagner [continuing]. And with the threat of China.

Secretary Blinken. Thank you. We will.

Mrs. Wagner. I thank you, Mr. Chairman, for your indulgence and I yield back.

Mr. Mast. Thank you, Vice Chair Wagner.

The chair now recognizes Mr. Bera.

Mr. Bera. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I want to, first, acknowledge and thank Ms. Shamblin for being here. I know your family’s from Roseville, which is approximate to my district in Sacramento County, and from what I’ve learned about Nicole she loved being a Marine.

She loved serving our country. She loved serving humanity and, you know, when I think about what I love about the United States of America—so I do not think about this as a Democrat or a Republican—I think about what our values are, our values of freedom of democracy, the obligations that we have in terms of global security and protecting those values around the world.

Mr. Secretary, I want to applaud you and the Administration in these first 2 years. You acknowledge that the world has changed.

I mean, there are new threats out there and, you know, I applaud the coalition building that the Administration’s done and
keeping the coalition together and protecting and preserving the freedom of the Ukrainian people and the country there.

I also want to applaud the trilateral alliance with Japan and Korea, which is at a very different place today than when you came into office, elevating the Quad coalition. And in this 21st century security architecture it will take coalitions of like-valued countries that really do share those values, the values that Nicole held dearly, and the best way to serve her memory is to continue to preserve these American values.

You're here to talk about the budget and, you know, obviously, an area that I spent a lot of time on is the competition in the Indo-Pacific. I appreciate the budget that you put forth in our competition with the People's Republic of China.

In the proposal, there's $400 million in discretionary funding in the Counter PRC Influence Fund. But there's also over $11 billion of mandatory funding that is part of our effort to outcompete China.

It's unusual to see a mandatory request in there and I think, you know, what staff informs me is we'll have to as a committee put forth authorizing legislation.

But I'd like to give you a chance to talk about why the mandatory funding is so important to—for our efforts to compete China.

Secretary BLINKEN. Thank you. I very much appreciate that, and I think it reflects what I'm hearing from many members of this committee—Democrats and Republicans alike—which is a recognition that when it comes to China this is a generational challenge for us and, in our judgment, discretionary funding alone will not help us get the job done in terms of outcompeting China where we are in intense competition.

We are providing in the budget and the plan that goes along with it new and innovative ways to try to provide viable alternatives at scale that discretionary funding alone cannot meet and when I say viable alternatives, I mean, things that countries around the world—potential partners, existing partners—need and are looking for and that the United States, hopefully, can help provide.

We have got long—term projects that need funding up front to cover longer periods than discretionary funding allows, and the predictability and the insulation from annual fluctuations for this discrete set of programs, we think, would be incredibly valuable.

It's a little bit modeled on what we see as the success of the CHIPS and Science Act where the State Department was given money over 5 years to work with other countries to secure semiconductor supply chains downstream and upstream as well as to try to make sure that countries that were developing information communications technology were doing so in secure ways with trusted vendors so that those networks were safe and secure.

That's a good model and it's replicated more broadly in this budget request.

Mr. BERA. And I think it's a model that sends the signal to not only the PRC but to the countries in the region. Certainly, the 7.1 billion for the COFA countries sends a strong signal to the Pacific Islands that America is there, we're committed, we're going to be there for the long haul and we have their back.
And, again, this committee will have to work on authorizing language. I would hope that language reflects the concern with China and that we can do that and work with the Administration to make sure that that funding is there.

You know, just in the brief time I have left, can you talk about the importance and of the trilateral relationship that—you know, and the place where, you know, I applaud President Yoon for his leadership as well as Prime Minister Kishida.

Secretary Blinken. Yes, I share that view, and I think for us to make sure that our two closest allies and partners in the region, Japan and Korea, not only are strengthening their relationships and partnerships with us but are doing so between themselves and among the three of us trilaterally further enhances not only our security but our ability to get lots of things done around the world.

We bring to bear the strengths of our three countries, of course, dealing with challenges posed by China, North Korea but, again, in so many other areas including the provision of humanitarian assistance including having safe and secure maritime domains, working in outer space together.

There are a multiplicity of things that we're doing through this trilateral coordination. President Biden brought the two leaders and we're doing that at every level.

Mr. Mast. The gentleman’s time has expired.

I now recognize myself.

Mr. Secretary, thanks for being here today. I'm going to start with the board behind me.

We have a data base of individuals that are coming forward to talk about their experiences with Afghanistan. A couple of weeks ago we had Sergeant Vargas-Andrews—amputee injured in the withdrawal of Afghanistan. Nobody—nobody—in any agency and asked his story whatsoever, even though he was at the tip of the spear of what had happened in the withdrawal.

And so we want to hear as we are doing oversight over what happened with the withdrawal of Afghanistan—we want to hear everybody's story, any story, whether they're an SIV, whether there's somebody still stuck in Afghanistan, whether they're a Marine, a soldier, somebody that was on the wall there that was brought in to assist with SIVs, State Department, somebody that sent the dissent cable.

We want to hear from those individuals because it is important to us that as we do oversight over the withdrawal of Afghanistan that we hear everybody's story which has not happened to date.

I want to start with a couple of questions, Mr. Secretary.

Was Joe Biden inaugurated and sworn in as president on January 20, 2021?

Secretary Blinken. Yes, he was.

Mr. Mast. And were you confirmed by the Senate on January 26th, 2021?

Secretary Blinken. That's correct.

Mr. Mast. And I do have a copy of your hearings. I want to reference one part of it with Senator Graham. On page 38 of it you aptly State that any withdrawal should be based upon conditions. You can agree with that?

Secretary Blinken. That was certainly the preferred course. Yes.
Mr. MAST. And moving backward in time, President Trump was in—rather, his team in Doha and secured an agreement with the Taliban?

Secretary BLINKEN. That’s correct.

Mr. MAST. It’s been brought up many times today?

Secretary BLINKEN. That’s correct.

Mr. MAST. And that agreement—again, I have that directly in front of me—first sentence in it peace agreement, four parts, guarantees enforcement mechanisms that will prevent the use of soil of Afghanistan by any group or individual against the security of the United States and its allies, right?

Secretary BLINKEN. Mmm-hmm.

Mr. MAST. Right? Conditions?

Secretary BLINKEN. Yes.

Mr. MAST. So the President agreed there needed to be conditions. You agreed there needed to be conditions. Nearly every member of this committee so far today has asked about Afghanistan to include yourself bringing it up and I just want to ask right now will you give us a commitment that you will come back here to discuss specifically the withdrawal of Afghanistan?

Secretary BLINKEN. Congressman, we will make sure, going forward, especially as the work of this committee and other committees continue on Afghanistan, that the State Department will be present and engaged.

Mr. MAST. Will you come back and answer questions about the withdrawal of Afghanistan?

Secretary BLINKEN. I’m not going to—I’m not going to prejudge that.

I, as you know, testified on the——

Mr. MAST. Do you think that you should answer questions on Afghanistan and will you?

Secretary BLINKEN. We will—I will certainly answer questions on Afghanistan one way or another and whatever the appropriate——

Mr. MAST. Will you come here in person and answer questions about Afghanistan?

Secretary BLINKEN. I’m happy to take that up with the chairman and ranking member.

Mr. MAST. I think you answered yourself. Will you come back here if invited to answer questions on Afghanistan?

Secretary BLINKEN. I look forward to making sure that I and other members of the State Department provide the information needed by this committee on Afghanistan, going forward, for the work that you’re doing.

Mr. MAST. I hope you do a better job at that than you have done to date. I want to move to a couple other questions.

On April 14th, 2021, President Biden announces the full withdrawal of all U.S. troops from Afghanistan. Do you know the date that he announced for that—that he announced we would withdraw?

Secretary BLINKEN. I believe you—did you just reference it?

Mr. MAST. The dates that he announced that we would actually withdraw.

Secretary BLINKEN. Oh, yes. I’m sorry. Yes, by September 1st.

Mr. MAST. He announced by September 11.
Secretary BLINKEN. Early September, yes.
Mr. MAST. Not early September, by September 11. That’s not just any date, correct?
Secretary BLINKEN. I think it underscores the fact that the mission that we set out to accomplish——
Mr. MAST. He announced we would withdraw on September 11, correct?
Secretary BLINKEN. You’re correct, and I think it underscores the fact——
Mr. MAST. Let’s not be bashful about that.
Secretary BLINKEN. No, I’m—my recollection, again, had been early September. I think—I think you’re correct. If September 11——
Mr. MAST. He also said this. He said, “I concluded it is time to end America’s longest war.” I concluded. He said it himself. Another quote from him, “I called President Bush to inform him of my decision to withdraw from Afghanistan.”
Was it President Biden’s decision to withdraw?
Secretary BLINKEN. It was. He is the Commander in Chief.
Mr. MAST. Absolutely, and I thank you for acknowledging that.
I want to move to just one other question here and this is specific to the withdrawal. On June 24 of that year it was announced again by President Biden that we would be drawing down to 650 troops specifically to provide security for diplomats after the main military force completes withdrawal. You understand that being the case?
Secretary BLINKEN. Yes, that’s correct?
Mr. MAST. So here’s my question. Of anybody that has ever spent five had minutes or 5 hours in Afghanistan what idiot would believe that is smart to remove the military force and leave the diplomats behind? And, obviously, it ended with them 50 days later having to bring back 3,000 to 8,000 troops. So what idiot decided that?
Secretary BLINKEN. Well, pursuant to the agreement reached by the previous Administration with the Taliban, the call for the withdrawal of all of our forces, all of them, by May 31st——
Mr. MAST. What idiot decided to pull out the main fighting force before pulling out the diplomats, which resulted in 3,000 to 8,000 additional troops being sent back into Afghanistan? What idiot decided that?
Secretary BLINKEN. Again, Congressman, pursuant to the agreements that had been reached by the previous Administration we were to withdraw all of our forces——
Mr. MAST. So you’re not going to answer the question. Par for the course with you. Thank you for answering some of my questions today. I hope you answer more of them later.
At this point I’m going to recognize Mr. Phillips.
Mr. Phillips, are you here? Yes, Mr. Phillips is here.
Mr. PHILLIPS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Welcome, Mr. Secretary.
I lost my father in the Vietnam War when I was 6 months old in 1969. Fifty-four years later, just last week, I was able to visit that country on the other side of the globe and actually go to the very dirt on which he took his last breaths, and you can all imag-
ine it was one of the most extraordinary meaningful experiences of my entire life.

And I returned to Washington last night and attended an event sponsored by TAPS that honors Gold Star families and to look at small children—American children—in the eyes who have lost loved ones in Iraq and Afghanistan, and I want to honor you, Mr. Mast, who gave so much of yourself in that effort.

It’s awfully difficult thing to do and all of us, every Gold Star family, child, brother, sister, mother, father, spends a lot of time wondering if it was worth it—if the loss of life was worth it.

And I just want to thank you for being so dedicated, both personally and professionally, to doing your best to ensure that the community of Gold Star families does not expand and I would simply ask that my colleagues on this committee, both Democrats and Republicans, as we litigate the past and hopefully learn from our mistakes, because dammit, we sure make a lot of them, that we spend equal time and energy to ensure that 1 day children who’ve lost their moms and dads in Iraq and Afghanistan and other parts of the world can also return to a country that is seeing economic growth and prosperity and safety and security, in no small part because of our investments.

And to that end, Mr. Secretary, I want to speak with you about flexibility that you need to take advantage of opportunities and windows when they arise.

The Middle East and North Africa Opportunity Fund, which is proposed in the new budget, would allow you to respond to opportunities as they might emerge in that region of the world.

So I’m just curious how you envision using such a program, how those decisions would be made between State and USAID and how you would prioritize that funding.

Secretary BLINKEN. These—this funding in particular, these kinds of programs in general and the flexibilities that go along with them allow us to take advantage of opportunities that come up to use our democracy and development programs to further peace, to further security, to try to create virtuous cycles.

I think, perhaps, it was the chairman before who referenced the Abraham Accords. We have been working assiduously both to help deep root the existing partnerships that have come from those accords as well as to expand the circle and part of that has been something that we put together last year that—it’s called the Negev Forum—that brought together Israel, the United Arab Emirates, Morocco, Bahrain, Egypt, and that in so doing is focused on concrete projects among those countries to include the Palestinians that can effectively improve the lives of their citizens.

So some of the funding that we have or are asking for would be to go to support those kinds of programs. We put together another program that actually brings, interestingly, Israel, the United Arab Emirates, and India together. It’s not the Middle East, per se, but it draws it in.

But across the board we are looking at programs and flexibilities that allow us to address the needs, the livelihoods, the security, the opportunity for people because when you provide that you take away one of the usual instigators for conflict, for instability, for
things that, inevitably, one way or another draw us in and cause us to spend a lot more money in so doing.

Mr. PHILLIPS. Well, I have high hopes for that and I hope——

Secretary BLINKEN. Thank you.

Mr. PHILLIPS [continuing]. I hope we can achieve it.

My second question is relative to Special Immigrant Visas, SIVs in Afghanistan. I do not think I’m the only one on this committee or in this entire Congress who is receiving an extraordinary number of calls to our offices from people who are trying their best to fulfill our promise to those who supported our efforts in Afghanistan and are deeply dismayed and troubled by the challenge and the backlog in obtaining those SIVs.

So what is State doing to affect that? Do you need more resources? Is there anything we can do? Because it is a great challenge for all of us and I think we are missing an important opportunity to fulfill a promise.

Secretary BLINKEN. We’re determined to do everything possible to get this right and we have dedicated the resources, the focus to it, to make sure that we’re doing that.

We have well over a hundred people at the department whose sole focus is this program as well as helping other Afghans at risk get out of Afghanistan.

We have at present a process that you know very well, that members this committee know very well, that is pursuant to legislation over many years with a dozen or so requirements in terms of moving people through the SIV process and we have worked with Congress to streamline that, to try to make it work more effectively.

We have at present a large number of people in the pipeline. Most of the people in the pipeline are at what we call the pre chief admission stage of this or at the chief admission stage. That’s the point at which it’s determined whether, in fact, they have met the requirements of the program.

Typically, when you have people in the pipeline we found historically that, unfortunately, about half of them wash out, which is to say it turns out they’re not eligible. Sometimes that’s because they are genuinely not. In other instances people are trying to get in through that program.

One of the big problems——

Mr. MAST. The gentleman’s time has expired.

Secretary BLINKEN [continuing]. Is documentation. We can come back to——

Mr. MAST. I thank Mr. Phillips for his words.

Mr. PHILLIPS. Thank you for prioritizing them and I yield back.

Mr. MAST. The chair now recognizes Mr. Buck for 5 minutes.

Mr. BUCK. I thank the Chair.

Mr. Secretary, thank you for being here.

During our freshman orientation years ago when I first got the Congress the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff sort of informed us of the various—the history of war, I guess. It started on land. It went to land and water. Went from land to sea to air.

We are now faced with a expanded area of warfare. We’re going to be looking at, evidently, cyber war and space war. It’s clear that before, during, and after Russia’s illegal invasion of Ukraine they
used cyber warfare to try to shut down government functions, including public utilities, to try to shut down the banking system, the health care system and other areas.

It is clear that cyber war is an integral part of any of our adversaries’ strategy. In addition, Facebook isn’t allowed in China. The Communist Party has banned it. Western search engines like Google aren’t allowed in China. The Communist Party has banned it.

No Netflix in China. No Wall Street Journal in China, both being banned by the Communist Party. American businesses like Microsoft Word can only operate in China after implementing stringent restrictions that show the CCP’s commitment to stifling outside ideas and to isolate information in China.

America does not place similar restrictions on Chinese companies or force them to serve under such onerous conditions. Bytedance owns and operates—is owned and operated by the Communist Party and is the parent company of CapCut and TikTok, two entities that gather extensive information about American citizens, including minors. Evidence shows that TikTok and CapCut collect the names, phone numbers, email addresses, IP addresses, biometric data, facial recognition, defining physical characteristics, keystroke logging that can yield bank information as well as personal medical histories, search history and proclivities, the content of messages sent on mobile devices, purchasing information about what products online somebody has purchased, file names and types of information stored in a mobile device, text messages, images, videos, any device on a clipboard, users’ activities on websites and apps.

Mr. Secretary, my question ultimately will be about whether we should ban TikTok and CapJack in—I should pronounce it right I guess—CapCut—in the United States.

It’s clear to me and I think to most people that cyber warfare is an important part of any future conflict with China or war with China.

China, particularly the CCP, is an adversary or enemy, depending on what language you want to use, of the United States. Communist China is gathering information on Americans that can be used in a cyber war.

Communist China does not allow U.S. companies to operate online apps in China. Doesn’t it make sense to ban TikTok and CapCut in the U.S. and do you support such a ban?

Secretary BLINKEN. Thank you very much, Congressman.

I appreciate very much the focus that you’re putting on this. Let me just say as a preliminary matter when it comes to TikTok, going back to July 2021 the State Department prohibited the use on our devices of TikTok.

Mr. BUCK. Thank you.

Secretary BLINKEN. We prohibited embassy contractors, third party vendors, from using it to create or manage accounts and we have been coordinating with partners across the board on data security policies to make sure that they’re aware of this problem.

As to the larger question, look, my understanding is that what has been proposed—more than proposed, insisted on, is the divest-
ment of TikTok of the—by the parent company, and whether that answers the mail is beyond my capacity to evaluate.

But clearly, we, the Administration, and others are seized with the challenge that it poses and are taking action to address it.

Mr. BUCK. Well, you said the challenge it poses. Is it a threat to the United States security?

Secretary BLINKEN. I believe that it is, yes.

Mr. BUCK. And shouldn't a threat to United States Security be banned? They do it to us. Why do not we do it to them?

Secretary BLINKEN. It should be ended one way or another and there are different ways of doing that.

Mr. BUCK. That was—that is a very clear answer. I appreciate that very much.

Mr. Secretary, I yield back.

Chairman McCaul [presiding]. The chair now recognizes Mr. Kim.

Mr. Kim of New Jersey. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Secretary, thanks for coming before us. I guess I just wanted to ask you—start with a question about Ukraine. Last year, we passed in this body the lend lease efforts when it comes to Ukraine, but I'll be honest, I haven't really heard anything about this ever since.

So I guess I just wanted to ask you has it been activated? Has it been used? How are we trying to integrate that into the efforts we're trying to deal with with Ukraine?

Secretary BLINKEN. Thank you very much, Congressman.

I'm not aware that that particular authority has been deemed necessary to use to date. We have, as you know, thanks to the incredible support from Congress on a bipartisan basis and, in effect, the incredible support from the American people provided very significant security assistance to Ukraine.

Not only that, we rallied other countries to do the same thing. We now have more than 50 partner countries. The security assistance will be provided mostly through draw downs from existing DoD accounts, has answered the needs of the Ukrainians as well as the work that our partners are doing. In addition, there are some direct sales and other things, but the main focus has been the draw down from DoD accounts.

Mr. Kim of New Jersey. I appreciate that. If you do not mind, I'd love to be able to follow with your team as well as with the Pentagon just about, you know, what was the determination that this does not need to be used at this point.

But I think you and I can agree, you know, we want to make sure that we're being as forward leaning as we can. This is such a critical year for Ukraine, so important that this does not drag on, because if it does drag on that's something that very much benefits Putin, very much benefits Russia, as they have that ability to kind of wait this out. We got to make sure that that coalition will is there.

Secretary BLINKEN. I agree with you.

Mr. Kim of New Jersey. I want to switch gears a little bit. I had a meeting recently with my constituents and they were raising their concerns about how Russia was suspending New Start, how we're seeing increased nuclear weapon development by China, and
it feels like we're at this place where we're starting to slide here after progress over previous decades on nuclear nonproliferation, on drawing that down.

But, you know, you and I were both dads of young kids and I just really worry that my kids are going to grow up in an era with just an even greater threat of nuclear weapons than the era that I grew up in.

So I wanted to just get a sense from you how central is this in your prioritization as we’re thinking about global competition?

Secretary Blinken. I very much share your concern. I think we have seen backsliding when it comes to arms control and non-proliferation because a number of countries have chosen to move in the wrong direction.

You mentioned Russia pulling out of New Start. I think that was a very regrettable and irresponsible decision. This was an agreement that benefited both of our countries in terms of its predictability, the visibility it gave us and, of course, the limitations.

Now, the Russians say they’re going to continue to abide by the limits but in the absence of the verification measures, obviously, that makes it more challenging to be sure.

Across the board we have seen movements backward. However, at the same time we have been—the United States has been deeply engaged with the nonproliferation treaty countries and, in fact, at the last review conference I think we actually took steps to strengthen the nonproliferation regime. Same thing with the Biological Weapons Convention. Same thing with the Chemical Weapons Convention, and there remains——

Mr. Kim of New Jersey. Is it——

Secretary Blinken [continuing]. A strong core group of countries that want to make sure that those institutions and those agreements are upheld.

Mr. Kim of New Jersey. We’re no doubt seeing rising challenges when it comes to this competition, especially vis-a-vis China and Russia. But you’re at the table with them. Is there any appetite at all as we increase this—as this competition unfortunately continues to increase to try to take some of that nuclear weapon concern off the table? I mean, just——

Secretary Blinken. There is certainly on our behalf. I’ve—I and other colleagues have engaged our Chinese counterparts on this repeatedly saying that we should at the very least work on greater safety security visibility, risk reduction, and——

Mr. Kim of New Jersey. Especially when it comes to the Chinese arsenal. I mean, they are rapidly increasing but their stocks are still significantly lower than where the United States and Russia are. So, you know, it feels like an opportunity here to really try to press on this and I urge you to do so.

Secretary Blinken. And I agree with you and, certainly, of course, with Russians, despite the aggression in Ukraine, despite the other areas where we are in, obviously, on polar opposite sides of things.

We have said all along that we believe it’s imperative to try to sustain and even build on arms control agreements because it’s in the interest of the world as well as the interests, of course, of the American people.
Mr. Kim of New Jersey. I do not have any more time left but I do want to just follow up with you after this about what we can do to make the visit of the South Korean president as successful as possible, going forward. I think that’s so key, especially as we talked about regarding South Korea and Japan.

Thanks so much, Mr. Secretary.

Secretary Blinken. I welcome that. Thank you.

Chairman McCaul. The chair recognizes Mr. Burchett.

Mr. Burchett. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Secretary, many of the documents your department are providing are heavily redacted. Here’s one of the documents you produced yesterday with no explanation for the redaction.

I mean, that looks like the Kennedy assassination files or maybe a UFO file, honestly. I think it’s a joke. Can you explain why it was redacted?

Mr. Burchett. Congressman, I cannot speak to that specific document. I cannot even tell what the document is. I’m sure that we can—if there are any concerns about redactions raise them. We’ll go over them, but I——

Mr. Burchett. I’m raising them. I’m raising them.

This one right here behind me on my right seems to be a talking points document with redacted answers. Can you give us any legitimate reason why the department redacted this information or refused to——

Secretary Blinken. Again, without looking at the specific document I cannot get into that.

Mr. Burchett. Your State department attorneys told the committee it should be grateful for having received any documents at all after a month—that it was exceptional for State to respond to any of chairman’s letters before the committee’s organizing meeting.

Sir, that’s an insult to Congress. It’s an insult to transparency. It should be an insult to the media. I believe that Gold Star families and members Congress and the veterans deserve these answers.

Do you think your attorney’s statement was appropriate in any way, shape, form or fashion?

Secretary Blinken. I’m not aware of the statement. I cannot speak to it. What I can tell you, though, is this.

One, I’m determined to make sure that this committee, other committees of Congress, receive the information that they need, particularly to conduct oversight.

Second, as a matter of long-standing practice it’s at least my understanding that previously before committees in Congress had been organized the executive branch did not engage with those committees.

Nonetheless, despite that, we began to work on requests that we knew were forthcoming before committees were organized in an effort to get ahead of things.

Mr. Burchett. Sir, I would suggest to you what you need and what you say you need is in direct conflict with what Congress is asking for. You’ve also stated that the climate crisis is the center of your foreign policy and national security goals.
With the war in Ukraine, fentanyl from China, tensions growing over Taiwan, of course, nuclear-armed North Korea and Iran, Mexican cartels, violence against Americans, and the Taliban controlling Afghanistan, is the climate crisis still your central policy?

Secretary BLINKEN. I'm not aware of that particular statement. I welcome seeing it. I think the issues you've just listed, which go very much to the statement I made at the beginning of this hearing, reflect the priorities that we're focused on.

Mr. BURCHETT. OK. Are there U.S.-sanctioned personnel in Ukraine? If so, why are they receiving our tax dollars?

Secretary BLINKEN. I'm sorry. U.S.-sanctioned personnel in Ukraine?

Mr. BURCHETT. Yes, sir.

Secretary BLINKEN. I'm not aware of that. I welcome any information you have.

Mr. BURCHETT. OK. Four billion U.S. tax dollars have gone to Ukrainian pensions. How is that any shape, form, or fashion justifiable?

Secretary BLINKEN. The program, Congressman, of the assistance to Ukraine has on the ground right now in my—our embassy about 47 personnel responsible solely for oversight.

We just had a report by the inspector—the Inspector General's office—looking at the oversight of the taxpayers' funds in Ukraine. The report was very positive in terms of the processes that are in place and the work that's being done to make sure that money is being spent appropriately as well as wisely.

At the same time, we have in place a process. For example, much of the funding that we provide—the taxpayers provide to Ukraine goes through a World Bank program that only disperses money upon receipts for authorized expenditures and we have third party validators to include Deloitte, which is working directly with the Ministry of Finance.

Mr. BURCHETT. I appreciate all that. But when we cannot fund Medicare and then we're funding Ukrainian pensions, I really think our priorities are out of whack.

Let me move on, if I could. A constituent of mine, Staff Sergeant Ryan Knauss, he was actually the last person who was killed in Afghanistan. He was killed at Abbey Gate. Why cannot his family know the full story of his death?

Secretary BLINKEN. Again—

Mr. BURCHETT. Can somebody get with me on that because it's very aggravating to me. The family is—they're neighbors of mine.

Secretary BLINKEN. I deeply appreciate that, Congressman. I would refer you to I think other departments that would be able to—

Mr. BURCHETT. OK. Let me ask you one quick—more question. Are you aware of Chinese spy equipment on U.S. infrastructure, particularly in the Gulf of Mexico, and what's your plan to stop the Chinese spying on domestic infrastructure?

Secretary BLINKEN. This is at the top of our priority list and making sure that any adversary competitor that would be engaged in undermining our cybersecurity that we're dealing with that effectively both in terms of our own government institutions, includ-
ing my department, where we have elevated that as a priority, as well as partners around the world who, for example——

Mr. BURCHETT. Well, what’s your plan to stop it?

Secretary BLINKEN. So we were deeply engaged with countries including Mexico to make sure, for example, that they do not take untrusted vendors into their communications networks in ways that could impact our security.

Mr. BURCHETT. This is on U.S. infrastructure, not Mexican infrastructure.

Secretary BLINKEN. Again, I’d refer you to Department of Homeland Security, to the other agencies that focus on this. I’d also welcome seeing the information that you have. I’m happy to follow up on it.

Mr. BURCHETT. Please have someone contact me.

Secretary BLINKEN. Thank you. I will do that. Thank you.

Chairman McCaul. The chair recognizes Ms. Manning.

Ms. MANNING. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you, Mr. Secretary, for being with us today and for your service to our country.

Mr. Secretary, we are experiencing a frightening global rise in anti-Semitism, including violent attacks against Jews and Jewish institutions, the spreading of conspiracy theories online, the scapegoating of Jews for the pandemic, for a wide variety of problems, and greater peril for Jews around the world.

The Pew Research Center just released a report with evidence of increased anti-Jewish hate and harassment in 94 countries around the world and the ADL just released a report showing a dramatic increase in anti-Semitism, hatred, and violence across the U.S., including on college campuses.

We have in our Special Envoy to Monitor and Combat Anti-Semitism Ambassador Lipstadt, a highly qualified and highly motivated person who has embraced her job and traveled around the world.

But we understand from her that her office is hampered by a lack of resources. They are having to use contract people rather than being able to hire their own staff.

So I’m asking for a commitment from you to evaluate whether additional funding is needed for her office as we have requested—a number of us have requested in a letter to increase the resources for that office to work on this critical issue.

Secretary BLINKEN. First of all, I share your deep concern about this both personally as well as professionally. Second, Ambassador Lipstadt is extraordinary. We’re very fortunate to have her, the leading expert of her generation, on the question and she’s doing a remarkable job.

Third, yes, we’ll certainly look to make sure that the resources are there for her to do her job as effectively as she can.

Ms. MANNING. Thank you for that. And we have a very active bipartisan Task Force to Combat anti-Semitism here in the house. We have engaged with the Second Gentleman and we are anxious to work with the Biden Administration’s interagency task force to combat anti-Semitism and we hope that you will be engaged in that as well.

I want to go to something that my colleague Mr. Phillips, raised. You detailed the—or he—you detailed the very important work
that is being done to strengthen the Abraham Accords in response to one of his comments with the working groups that have come out of the Negev Summit, the opportunities for the Abraham Accord countries to work together on issues that are critical to building strong relationships and stronger economies for all of those countries that are participating.

Of course, the one major player in the region that has not joined the Abraham Accords is Saudi Arabia and there were great hopes that bringing Saudi Arabia into the Accords would enhance the effectiveness of those Accords, create a security alliance to counter the malign activities of Iran and, as we all know, China recently brokered a rapprochement between Iran and Saudi Arabia.

How do you view that new development and what impact do you think it will have on the future growth of the Abraham Accords?

Secretary BLINKEN. Thank you. First, as you know, Saudi Arabia and Iran have been talking for several years about seeing if they can restore their diplomatic relations. Those relations were cutoff, I think, back in 2016 when Saudi Arabia put to death a prominent Shi’a cleric, and then there was an attack on the Saudi embassy in Iran. No surprise diplomatic relations were suspended.

So they’ve been talking in Oman. They’ve been talking in Baghdad. In terms of China’s role, they, to the best of our understanding, in effect hosted the final session that led to the agreement. Nothing more, nothing less.

Now, what I’ll say is this. To the extent that that agreement, if implemented—and that’s a question mark—if implemented actually does reduce some tensions and curbs some of the deeply objectionable Iranian behavior particularly, for example, attacks on Saudi Arabia, facilitating attacks by the Houthis on Saudi Arabia, where, by the way, we have 80,000 American citizens, that would be a good thing and countries around the world to include China if they act responsibly and trying to help bring countries together to lessen tensions, reduce conflict, that’s a good thing.

As I said, I have some questions about whether this will be implemented. But if it is that will be a modest——

Now, on the Abraham Accords, I do not think it affects them, which is to say that we are very focused both on deepening the Accords among the existing participants and broadening it. And, of course, Israel makes no secret that it hopes that Saudi Arabia would sign on at some point and that’s—that remains an objective.

President Biden’s trip to Saudi Arabia, I think, helped further the relationship between Israel and Saudi Arabia and we’ll look to see in the months ahead, hopefully, more progress on that. Again, that would be good for Israel. It would be good for Saudi Arabia.

Ms. MANNING. Thank you, Mr. Secretary. I do have specific questions about your budget with regard to the use of the Middle East and North Africa Opportunity Fund.

We will submit those to your office. Thank you, and I yield back.

Secretary BLINKEN. Thank you.

Chairman McCaul. The gentlelady yields.

The chair recognizes Mr. Barr.

Mr. BARR. Mr. Secretary, thank you for your service.

In the readouts from your February 18th meeting with a top Chinese diplomat Wang Yi it is noted that you raised the spy balloon
as a violation of U.S. sovereignty in violation of international law. We thank you for that.

But it’s clear from our own State Department that the CCP never gave an explanation for the balloon in your meeting and that in this meeting, to their understanding, they said it, quote, “paved the way for the resumption of future high-level dialog between the two sides, and the two countries can now talk beyond the balloon issue and come back to the negotiating table and other pressing issues.”

That does not sound like you offered any deterrence whatsoever for future incursions into our airspace. Why is that a concern? Because this balloon flew over Malmstrom Air Force Base, our nuclear triad, Minot Air Force Base, Warren Air Force Base, Offutt Air Force Base in Nebraska, headquarter to STRATCOM, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, Whiteman Air Force Base where our B-2s are, Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri, Fort Campbell in my State of Kentucky, Arnold Air Force Base, Tennessee, Camp Frank D. Merrill, Georgia, Shaw Air Force Base, South Carolina, Joint Base Charleston, South Carolina.

Mr. Secretary, this spy balloon should have been shot down as soon as it entered the U.S. Air Defense Zone north of Alaska’s Aleutian Islands on January 28th. Tell me specifically what your plan is to prevent further PRC incursions into the U.S. homeland.

Secretary BLINKEN. We told our Chinese counterparts—I told them directly that the balloon flying over the United States—the spy balloon flying over the United States was unacceptable and could not happen again and we’re determined to make sure that it does not.

Not only that, as you know, we were able to expose the entire program, a program that affected more than 40 countries across five continents. That resulted not just in us but many other countries going into China and making clear their opposition to what China was doing and it’s unacceptability.

So I think the fact that that program has been exposed for the world to see has clearly put the brakes on it.

Mr. BARR. Well——

Secretary BLINKEN. We will take whatever action is appropriate in any given circumstance to protect the security of the United States. In this particular circumstance, as colleagues have laid out, we made a determination, first of all, when the balloon—when it was clear the balloon was flying over sensitive sites we made a determination to, first of all, protect those sites with measures that were taken; second, to make sure that at the earliest opportunity in ways that does not endanger the population on the ground to shoot down that balloon and that’s exactly what we did.

Mr. BARR. Well, if I may interject, Secretary, I appreciate your dialog. But and as you noted there was no apology, not that we were expecting an apology, but the fact that we did not shoot it down before it entered our airspace over the Pacific, not over the Atlantic, was an invitation for further incursions.

Talk is cheap. Deterrence requires force when our airspace and our sovereignty is at issue. Let me move on to another question.

Secretary BLINKEN. I agree with you. Once something is in our airspace and in our sovereignty we need to take action.
Mr. BARR. This week’s summit between Putin—this week’s summit between Putin and Chinese leader Xi Jinping reinforced the no limits relationship between those two authoritarian regimes.

In fact, Xi described the visit as a new chapter in strengthening relations between Beijing and Moscow. They are saying that this was portrayed in China as a bold initiative to create a new world order.

In your meeting with China’s top diplomat Wang you warned about the implications and consequences if China provided material support to Russia for its ongoing invasion of Ukraine.

But on February 27th we finally received the required report from my ACCESS Act giving full unclassified assessment of China’s support of Russia’s illegal foreign invasion of Ukraine and that report said that Russian custom records indicated PRC firms have provided Russian entities with restricted and dual-use products, which can be used in Russia’s prosecution of its war against Ukraine.

Chinese State-owned defense companies have shipped navigation equipment, jamming technology, jet fighter parts to sanction government-owned defense companies.

The New York Times—since Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, China has sold more than $12 million in drones and drone parts to the country. And then according to trade and customs data, Chinese companies, including one connected to the government of Beijing, have sent Russian entities assault rifles and other equipment that can be used for military purposes.

So my question is, you know, why are you then just saying on February 18th you’re just warning of consequences for providing Russia material support when the State Department comes out 9 days later with an entire year’s worth of unclassified evidence of China’s material support to Russia?

Secretary BLINKEN. Congressman, we’re focused on lethal material support being provided by the Chinese State to the Russian—

Mr. BARR. This looks like lethal support.

Secretary BLINKEN. And we’re also tracking the provision by private enterprises of dual-use technology that could be of concern. So this is—this is—

Mr. BARR. I think we need to sanction China for their lethal support. It’s not just buying the oil and buying the gas. We have documented trade records, custom records, providing lethal support now. We need to get tougher on the CCP. They are financing this war in Russia and they are providing lethal support according to this trade and customs data. We need action and I urge this Administration to follow suit.

I yield back.

Secretary BLINKEN. Thank you.

Chairman McCaul. The gentleman yields back.

The chair recognizes Mrs. Cherfilus-McCormick. I hope I got that right.

Mrs. CHERFILUS-McCORMICK. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Secretary Blinken, thank you so much for being here. The political and economic climate in Haiti is deteriorating significantly in recent years. The situation is so severe that nearly 20,000 people
in Port-au-Prince are facing famine, food insecurity, the first in our hemisphere record history.

Insecurity is driving up the cost of delivering aid or making some areas completely inaccessible. Humanitarian actors, including Haitian-led NGO’s, civil society, are working tirelessly to meet the needs of people. But a political solution is required to address the full scale of this crisis. In addition, from January to mid March, 531 people were killed and 300 injured by gang incidents.

How does the budget request reflect the department’s outlook on the political solution to the crisis in Haiti and if it does how does it prioritize it?

Secretary BLINKEN. Thank you. We have at least two if not more interconnected problems and you point to the two main ones. We need a political way forward in Haiti that produces a fully legitimate government that’s able to do the business of the Haitian people.

At the same time, given the absence of security, given the profound insecurity it’s very hard for Haitians to move forward on a political track, never mind conduct elections, and the profound insecurity is driven primarily by the fact that gangs have authority over critical parts of Port-au-Prince, other major cities, gangs, who are doing in many cases the bidding of political and other elites, and at the same time are overwhelming, in many cases, the Haitian National Police.

So we have been working on a number of things to try to reverse the situation. One, we’re trying to break the nexus between some of these elites in the gangs with a very focused sanctions approach to go at those elites, and not just us. Canada, other countries, are focused on doing this with us.

Second, we have been working to support, strengthen, buildup the Haitian National Police, again, with other countries, through training, through the provision of equipment, et cetera. That has been a challenging process. We continue to work on it and more needs to be done.

Third, our diplomats are engaged with the Haitian government and key stakeholders in Haiti to try to move forward on the political track and to try to find some kind of agreement among them, including with the Montana Group, that would allow them to move forward with elections, assuming that the security situation improves.

So we’re working on all of those tracks. We have resources in the budget to help provide for that. It’s primarily a function in this moment of our diplomacy and also diplomacy with other countries to get them engaged in supporting the Haitian people.

Mrs. CHERFLILUS-McCORMICK. Thank you. And also this week Ranking Member Gregory Meeks and I introduced the Haiti Criminal Collusion Transparency Act, which requires the Secretary of State to submit an annual report to Congress regarding the ties between criminal gangs and political economic elites in Haiti, imposing sanctions on political and economic elites involved in such criminal activity.

How does the budget address the corruption and the collusion taking place in Haiti? In addition to that, have you seen any ad-
vancement when it comes to governance and a transition government?

Secretary Blinken. So yes, I think you underscore the very important point that trying to break this nexus between political elites and the gangs is critical and that's exactly what our focus has been and it's primarily been with directly targeting those elites that are supporting gangs who are trying to use them to advance their own their own purposes, including denying them the ability to come to the United States, going after their assets here. Many of the people in question like to go back and forth.

So I think that focus has some real potential. And as I said, our diplomats are deeply engaged, working both with the government, with stakeholders like the Montana Group, to see if we can help support an agreed way forward on getting to elections.

Mrs. Cherflus-McCormick. Since being elected to Congress I've led charge on many issues concerning the Republic of Haiti. In December, a few of my colleagues went on a CODEL to the U.N. where we had—were briefed on the dire situation in Haiti.

It was during this briefing that there are many conversations about potential intervention. Does this budget have any—allow any money for the potential intervention to the Republic of Haiti?

Secretary Blinken. So what we're looking at, and we're talking to a number of other countries to include Canada, is what would be necessary to, again, help strengthen the Haitian National Police and help improve the security environment so that the political process can move forward.

There's been discussion of some kind of multinational force at the United Nations, something that we're actively—the discussion that we're actively participating in. The President will be going to Canada tonight, in fact, where we'll pursue conversations with the Canadian government about what we might do together, along with other countries, CARICOM countries, countries in the region, to support that.

But we're looking at the best ways that we can find, again, to deal with the insecurity problem. First and foremost, that really goes to bolstering the HNP, the Haitian National Police, but we are looking at whether additional measures need to be taken. And if that's the case—and we're not there yet—we will make sure that they're properly resourced.

Mrs. Cherflus—McCormick. And my final question, which I will be submitting to your office, is about the gender-based violence that we're seeing skyrocketing in Haiti, and if the budget will be addressing that.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Secretary Blinken. Happy to look at that. Thank you very much.

Chairman McCaul. The gentlelady yields.

The chair recognizes Mr. Green.

Mr. Green. Thank you, Chairman McCaul.

Mr. Secretary, I want to thank you for appearing here. I was encouraged to hear in your testimony that you want to restore Congress's pivotal role in foreign policy process. That's a goal that you and I share.

But if that's a genuine goal or desire of yours, two things have to happen. First, it'd be great if you could appear before us more
than once a year. That would be greatly appreciated. We enjoy the dialog. I know you and I’ve had some agreements where we have talked about things, of course, my nearshoring bill. Your department did a wonderful job providing some input on that.

But, second, I think you should own some of the mistakes. I think it would give you incredible credibility if you did that, both mistakes made and mistakes being made.

One of the worst decisions, and I want to take an opportunity to point this out, I think the State Department has made is abandoning the asylum cooperation agreements that were negotiated with Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras under the previous Administration.

I think this was one of the first actions that you took in office back in February and it’s been one of the most damaging to our homeland security, and I speak as the chair of that committee.

As you know, there are currently no legal mechanisms to return a migrant to a transitory country they pass through on their way to the United States.

Despite a humanitarian crisis on our border with Mexico, you withdrew from essential agreements with our allies that were stemming the scourge of human trafficking and the flow of lethal drugs through Central America, and I think that’s both shameful and preventable.

The border chief just recently gave testimony to the Committee on Homeland Security and he identified the empowerment of the cartels by using mass waves of people to control five of our nine sectors on our Southwest border due to the loss of the ability one of the reasons to return people and the termination of these return agreements has been a complete and utter disaster, I believe, on many of the metrics that you in this budget process say you support. You said you were pursuing a free, secure—and I’m quoting—“free, secure, open and prosperous world.”

But I want to tell you that we do not get a prosperous free world when you allow cartels to smuggle narcotics and traffic migrants across the Western Hemisphere and into our country.

You’ve also allowed our relationships with Latin American countries to deteriorate. I look at the many, I would say, the metastasis of Cubazuela across Latin America, and for instance, just recently—here’s an example—Mexico, with its increasingly becoming lawless, a puppet of the cartels almost.

I mean, the Mexican military just recently illegally seized the private property of an American company, a company with significant presence in my district in Tennessee, and rather than working to stop those violent cartels and deadly fentanyl, taking American lives, Mexico is using its military and law enforcement to occupy private property of American citizens—American businesses—and that’s really unacceptable and it shows how the perpetual weakness that we sometimes portray in this Administration is emboldening the Mexican government’s lawlessness.

My first question to you is on fentanyl, and it’s killed over 70,000 Americans just last year. The Mexican cartels primarily use Chinese-sourced precursor chemicals in what is the most surveilled society on the planet. They cannot tell us where that’s coming from.
I’d like to ask what steps in 2023 the department plans to take to counter the cartels’ production and trafficking of fentanyl into the United States.

Secretary BLINKEN. Thank you. Thanks for that question. I really do appreciate it because I share not only a deep concern. This is an absolute top priority for us as I know it is for you.

As you point out, fentanyl is the number-one killer of Americans aged 18 to 49. We see the devastating consequences of happening in community after community. We seized more fentanyl last year or enough fentanyl last year to kill every single American. So, yes, we are seized with this. Let me just——

Mr. GREEN. And you understand—just I do not mean to inter-
rupt.

Secretary BLINKEN. Please go ahead.

Mr. GREEN. You do understand that it’s—those increased sei-
zures are a neutralization attack from the cartels. I mean, they’re flooding the crossing sites so your numbers are going to go up.

The CBP is being thinned and put at those crossing sites because they have to because of those mass waves run by the cartels, and that’s allowing more fentanyl to come in. I mean, the dollar price of fentanyl in my district, according to our sheriffs, went from $95 in January 21 to $28. So that means the supply—you get it.

Secretary BLINKEN. Yes. No. No. I really do appreciate that. Let me just say very quickly this is hugely important and we want to work with you on this.

We are engaged in a comprehensive approach. Obviously, what we’re—the things that we’re doing at home to reduce demand, increase treatment, provide antidotes, are usually important but while unnecessary, obviously, insufficient.

We have the border itself. As you know from your work, at least according to DHS, about 90 percent—95 percent of the fentanyl coming into the United States from Mexico is coming from—through legal points of entry.

We have technology that you, I know, are well aware of that can help us better detect the efforts to smuggle through points of entry this fentanyl which is being deployed.

Third, we are working with Mexico to try to disrupt the cartels, to try to disband the places where fentanyl is being manufactured. Mexico is usually security challenged. That is no secret. They have put increased resources into this. Their seizures of fentanyl are up.

The forces they have deployed to deal with it are up. We put together last year a joint program to bring our resources together to deal with this in Mexico to include also bringing in other agencies that are critical.

Let me just very quickly do two things. Third, because your—fourth, excuse me—the international beyond Mexico component of this is hugely important. That goes to China.

One of the things that we know is happening is that legal precur-
sors are being diverted into illicit use to manufacture synthetic opioids like fentanyl.

So I have seized the G-20, the 20 leading economies in the world to include China, on this. We just had a foreign ministers meeting where for the first time fentanyl was put front and center on the
agenda. We’ll be establishing a working group to bring these countries and the private sector together to work on this.

One of the things that we can do effectively, I believe, that we haven’t done in the past, information sharing, labeling, “know your customer” so that companies that are unintentionally having their products diverted into illegal use will have a way of dealing more effectively with this.

Now, one way or another we need to bring China into this.

Mr. Green. Yes. Please. Yes.

Secretary Blinken. My hope would be cooperatively. But in the absence of that, we have to look at other steps that we can take.

Mr. Green. On a separate note—and I’ll be very quick, Mr. Chairman—I’d like to connect with your office about some cyber stuff that sits in both, as I straddle being on this great committee with this great chairman, and serve in Homeland Security, I have some ideas I’d like to run by you. Thank you.

Secretary Blinken. I would welcome that. Thank you.

Chairman McCaul. The gentleman yields back.

Ms. Dean. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I thank you and the ranking member for this hearing today.

Welcome, Secretary Blinken. Mrs. Herrera, I did want to also offer my heartfelt sympathy and the heartbreak of our Nation on the loss of Marine Sergeant Nicole Gee. What a beautiful and powerful woman. We share your pride.

I really thank the chairman for allowing you to express more information about what the State Department is doing about my colleagues’ concern about fentanyl and the illicit use of the precursors as well as the transportation. As you point out, 95 percent of the fentanyl pouring into this country is coming through legal ports of entry. Sadly, many times in the hands or behind the wheel is an American.

So I did want to let you know that we have recently begun a bipartisan fentanyl prevention caucus. Love to work with you and the State Department on it. Representative Issa of this Committee, Representative Calvert, Joe Neguse and I are co-chairing that——

Secretary Blinken. Really welcome that.

Ms. Dean. Thank you. I’d look forward to doing that.

In the little time that I have I wanted to quote what I read last night in your testimony and what you said again today. We meet at an inflection point. There is an intense competition underway to determine what comes next.

The United States has a positive vision for the future, a world that is free, secure, open, and prosperous, and I thank you and the Administration for that vision, for that mission. I wanted to say you also read—and remember this is about your budget request and I want to root my questions in your budget request to be as effective as we can be.

You say the budget will help us push back on advancing authoritarianism and democratic backsliding. Two areas of the world of conflict that I want to talk about—they’re quite different—are Ukraine and Israel. In both cases, the United States is the indispensable nation.
As I have visited Israel or nations near Ukraine that is what everyone tells us. And it is not a haughty statement. It is a statement of truth. I’m proud of the Administration for bringing together more than 50 nations for Ukraine and my ambition, like I think so many others, is that we, this indispensable nation, bring together a coalition bring an end to this war as quickly as possible—that it not be a sustained war.

So tell us about the State Department budget request and what can that budget request do? What can the diplomatic efforts do and are doing right now to make sure we bring a quick end to the war in Ukraine?

Secretary BLINKEN. Thank you, Congresswoman.

First, we did not want this war. We did everything possible to try to prevent it. I engaged in intense diplomacy with my Russian counterpart—our Russian counterparts.

So did other members of the Administration. We tried to address concerns the Russians purportedly had about security, just as we insisted that they address ours.

Unfortunately, it became apparent—and you do not have to take my word for it, President Putin says it directly—that this was never about concerns Russia had about its security coming from NATO or coming from Ukraine, of all things.

It was always about Putin’s belief that Ukraine is not an independent country, that it needs to be erased from the map and subsumed into Russia as part of the greater Russian Empire and that’s exactly what he set out to do and that’s exactly what we stopped.

Ukraine’s independence, its sovereignty, is clearly established. It’s not going anywhere. Ukrainians are not going anywhere. But, of course, exactly where this settles and how it settles is hugely important, and in my judgment and in the judgment of the Administration, we desperately want to see peace as—although Ukrainians want it more than anyone. They’re the ones who are subjected to this aggression every single day.

But it needs to be a just and durable peace and by just I mean a peace that reflects the basic principles that underlie the international system and the United Nations Charter—territorial integrity, sovereignty, independence—and it needs to be durable in the sense that we do not want this to settle in a place where it’s easy for Russia to just rest, refit, and then reattack 6 months, a year, two or 3 years later.

So those elements are critical. If we saw any indication that Russia was ready and prepared for meaningful diplomacy to end this aggression, we would jump on it.

Unfortunately, what we have seen to date is the absolute absence of that evidence.

Ms. DEAN. Forgive me. Because my time is so short, I do want to ask you about Israel, another country that suffers with its own security from without and the threat of its erasure. But it also is struggling internally.

I want to echo the words of President Biden in a comment to the New York Times last month: “The genius of American democracy and Israeli democracy is that they are both built on strong institutions, checks and balances, and an independent judiciary.”
As we know, there are troubling crises in Israel. What is it that the United States can do? And I know there was a conversation or conversations held yesterday to push back against what’s going on to undermine institutions and to undermine an independent judiciary there at the peril of Israeli citizens, both Jews and Arabs, both Israelis and Palestinians? What are we doing to move forward with a two-State solution? Is there any hope?

Secretary Blinken. So, first, we see the extraordinary vibrancy of Israel’s democracy every single day as they have this debate about the future of their judiciary and that’s to Israel’s credit.

As Israel’s closest friend and strongest supporter we talk about these issues all the time, and as President Biden said, I think, very aptly and very eloquently for both of us when we’re looking at very significant reforms, I think we both found in our history that the best way to have a sustainable outcome that people support is to try to find consensus and consensus usually requires compromise on all sides.

So our hope is that that’s what they’ll do. But it’s not for us to tell them what to do or how they should do it. They have a strong democratic system——

Chairman McCaul. The gentlelady’s time has expired and I apologize——

Ms. Dean. And if I could followup——

Secretary Blinken. Be happy to.

Chairman McCaul. Mr. Secretary, we want to keep you on time for 1:30.

Secretary Blinken. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Chairman McCaul. So the chair recognizes Mrs. Kim.

Mrs. Kim of California. Thank you, Chairman.

Thank you, Secretary Blinken, for being here with us and it’s good to see you.

The Biden Administration has highlighted the Indo-Pacific as critical to U.S. national security and in the Biden National Security Strategy, the Indo-Pacific’s importance is highlighted stating, “no region will be of more significance to the world and to everyday Americans than the Indo-Pacific,” end quote.

Yet, in the Fiscal Year 2024 diplomatic programs budget the East Asian and Pacific Affairs was the fourth largest bureau. So why is it that the department is saying that the Indo-Pacific is the most important region but treating it as the fourth most important?

Secretary Blinken. Well, I think one of the things—thank you, Congresswoman—I think you’re exactly right, that for us this is the—in many ways the most dynamic, fastest growing region in the world.

We know that it’s generated about 75 percent of economic growth in recent years. Trading partners, investment partners, and obviously, strategically, hugely important and we are a Pacific nation ourselves.

But precisely because of that we have infused the work that we are doing in the Indo-Pacific across all of our bureaus and so as a result of that we have in bureaus like European Affairs Bureau now expertise on the Indo-Pacific so that they can work, for example, with colleagues in Europe to make sure that we are coordi-
nated and that we're approaching these issues in the same way to-
gether.

Mrs. KIM OF CALIFORNIA. So I want to know what resources you
intend to use and devote to supporting human rights like in
Xinjiang and stopping the genocide of Uyghurs and other ethnic
minorities by the CCP. That is an important area for me.

Secretary BLINKEN. So this is—yes, I agree with you, and I think
this is a central—again, a central focus of our diplomacy. We have
put a spotlight on the genocide being committed against Uyghurs
and other minorities in Xinjiang, the abuses that are being com-
mitted.

We, of course, have declared it such. We have rallied other coun-
tries to sanction China for the actions that it's taking there, which
has resulted in reactions from Beijing against those countries in-
cluding the use of economic coercion, which we're also combating.

We have our own human rights report that I personally put out
every single year including last week that, among other things,
continues to highlight this and expose it so it becomes——

Mrs. KIM OF CALIFORNIA. Thank you for continuing to highlight
that. Thank you so much. And I want to talk about the very impor-
tant issue too in Taiwan area.

You know, last year I spearheaded and got signed into law the
Arms Exports Delivery Solutions Act that calls upon the State De-
partment to find ways to expedite arms sales to Taiwan, and in
your budget you propose a budget increase for the Bureau of Politi-
cal Military Affairs that oversees arms sales and foreign military
sales.

So what is the State Department's plan to use that proposed in-
crease in budget to speed up the arms sales to Taiwan?

I mean, we are thankful that the Biden Administration has stat-
ed that we will allow Taiwan to purchase more, but I think that
just underscores the need to deliver what they already purchased
and pay for.

Secretary BLINKEN. Yes, I very much appreciate that and I also
appreciate what you did. One of the things that we have worked
on and that I've directed the Assistant Secretary of State for Polit-
cal Military Affairs to do is to look at what we can do as our part
of the process to streamline the work that we're doing on ourselves
for a couple of reasons.

One, as you've noted, because it's so critically important in the
case of Taiwan to make sure that it has the means to deter and
defend against a possible aggression.

But beyond that, we also have countries now in different parts
of the world that are rethinking long-standing relationships with
other countries, particularly Russia, and are looking to see what di-
rection they might move in. Part of that goes to making sure that
they have the equipment they need to defend themselves and that
often goes to us.

So we're looking at this across the board. I will say that, first,
if you look at what's going on, the longest pole in the tent when
it comes to this is production.

Now, there are process issues that are real and that we're work-
ing to streamline. But, principally, the longest pole in the tent by
far is the actual production for a whole variety of reasons. So that's—there's a big focus on that.

In our case——

Mrs. KIM OF CALIFORNIA. I appreciate that. But I do have one important issue that I did want to bring up. But I do want to also thank you, but please find out what the delay is and then let's deliver what they already pay for it. That's what I'm talking about.

Eyvin Hernandez is an LA-based attorney who was wrongfully detained in Venezuela in March 2022. Last year, I signed a letter led by Representatives Bass and Barragan calling on President Biden to take the necessary steps to bring Eyvin home. So can you provide me with an update on this wrongful detention and steps the—your Administration is taking to secure his release?

Secretary BLINKEN. I share your determination to bring him home, to bring any wrongfully detained American home.

I actually spoke with the family myself. I think it was in late January. We have a team that I think you know well that engages with the family on a very regular basis led by Roger Carstens.

He and the head of our Venezuela affairs unit have been to Venezuela on multiple occasions to try to secure the release of those who are being wrongfully detained. As you know, we were able to bring home a number of Americans who had been wrongfully detained by Venezuela. We will continue that effort until we bring Eyvin and any others home.

Mrs. KIM OF CALIFORNIA. Thank you.

Secretary BLINKEN. I thank you for keeping the spotlight on that.

Chairman MCCAUL. The chair recognizes Ms. Jacobs.

Ms. JACOBS. Well, thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you, Mr. Secretary, for joining us. Great to see you.

We have heard a lot of talk here today about Afghanistan. A key thing that came out of our last hearing on Afghanistan was the need for the State Department to actually be resourced to have the capacity that we needed to do the missions we're asking it to do and I think a big part of that is us in Congress having culpability for looking at how we have historically underfunded and underinvested in the State Department and our development efforts, and as we move forward to look at strategic competition I think we need to make sure that we do not make the same mistake.

So, Mr. Secretary, if you look at our investments in the State Department over, say, the past 10 years, how would you characterize them versus the need?

Secretary BLINKEN. Well, it won't surprise you that the—while we have made real progress, especially the last 2 years, which I'm grateful to Congress for on a bipartisan basis, we can always do more and we should always try to do more.

Having said that, of course, we have to be responsible stewards of the taxpayers' money. The budget that we put forward, I think, is an accurate reflection of what we believe we need to not only sustain but strengthen all of these programs and we look forward to working with Congress hopefully to achieving it.

Ms. JACOBS. Well, I appreciate that and I'm very supportive of the 14 percent increase that you all have asked for. If you look at the investments we have made over the past 10 years, how does
that compare with that of China? Have they been increasing their investments in development and diplomacy?

Secretary BLINKEN. Dramatically, and we have seen a dramatic investment by China in terms of both the resources that they put into this as well as their presence.

One of the reasons that we are determined, for example, to build back or buildup our presence in the Pacific Islands is precisely because they’re there and we are not. We have opened up in the Solomon Islands, Vanuatu. We’re looking at Kiribas, Tonga. We need to be there.

But across the board, we see this. But I also want to make something clear because it’s important. When it comes, for example, to some of the investments that China is making in other countries, they have the ability in their system to direct State resources at it.

Our system is different. What we can do and I think can do effectively is to serve as a catalyst primarily for the private sector to be more engaged in critical areas and that’s what we’re working on. We have tools like the Development Finance Corporation that are, I think, critical to doing that.

One of the things that we’d like to see is lifting some of the existing restrictions on the DFC so that it can better deploy its equity investments, which we’ll leverage 10 times, 100 times, that from the private sector. That’s our comparative advantage and we need to be able to seize it.

Ms. JACOBS. Well, we are supportive of that as well. I was just hoping you could quickly talk to the committee about how the disparity in the way we have invested in diplomacy and the way China has invested in diplomacy is impacting our ability to strategically compete around the world.

Secretary BLINKEN. Well, again, part of it goes to our actual presence and we also very much appreciate some of the new authorities that we have for the State Department to establish new posts and also to find ways to manage risks that are—in a reasonable way including with the construction of new facilities.

But it does go to—not just to the presence but it goes to what we were just talking about. It goes to the resourcing of these programs and I think we have to be smart and effective about it by which I mean, one, leveraging the private sector; two, leveraging partners and allies.

One of the things that we have done, just to give you a quick example, the Mineral Security Partnership. We put together a coalition of countries so that we can pool our information and to some extent pool our resources to make sure that we and other like-mindeds and friendly countries are making investments around the world in critical minerals that we want to make sure no country has a monopoly on, given how important they are to a 21st century economy, including semiconductors.

Ms. JACOBS. Yes. Well as the ranking member of the Africa Subcommittee, I can tell you firsthand I’ve heard from many of our partner countries that they’ve noticed the lack of American investment in the African continent and other places and are eager to see our presence grow.
Just really quickly, I appreciated that you mentioned in your opening remarks about the Diplomatic Support and Security Act, my bill which we passed last term, which would relieve and incentivize the department to be less risk averse.

Has the department communicated this specific congressional action to the overseas diplomatic corps?

Secretary BLINKEN. To foreign—to the foreign diplomatic corps?

Ms. JACOBS. To our diplomatic——

Secretary BLINKEN. To our own diplomatic corps? Yes, very much so. One of the things we—in fact, I think I recently referred to these new authorities in a communication with our personnel.

We have people around the world who want to make sure that we’re leaning in and want to make sure that we have the ability to do that, while, of course, managing risk appropriately. My top job, of course, is looking out for the security and safety of our people. But we also want to make sure that we’re engaged and managing risks in a smart way.

Ms. JACOBS. Well, I appreciate that and I look forward to working together to make sure that RSOs and others have what they need to be able to get our folks out and doing their job. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Secretary BLINKEN. Thank you very much.

Chairman McCaul. The chair recognizes Ms. Salazar.

Ms. SALAZAR. Wonderful to see you again.

Secretary BLINKEN. Nice to see you.

Ms. SALAZAR. Sure. I’m sure—I’m sure you are.

So four countries in Latin America, and we’d love to—short answers because you know we have 5 minutes.

Dominican Republican. Do you think that the actual government for the Dominican Republic is racist, yes or no?

Secretary BLINKEN. The actual government of the Dominican Republic? No. We have concerns about the treatment of the Haitian population. But the government, no.

Ms. SALAZAR. But then, Mr. Secretary, you have told the African Americans in this country not to travel to the island and that happened last November.

Secretary BLINKEN. We had a security concern and my number-one responsibility besides looking out for my own people is making sure looking out for Americans.

We have worked with the government of the Dominican Republic repeatedly well in advance of putting that notice out to try to address the concerns that had been raised. But we got to a point where we felt it was important to make sure that people could look out for the——

Ms. SALAZAR. For you put a travel ban and affect their economy, tourism specifically, it has to—you need to have some proof and Chairman McCaul and myself we have asked the State Department to provide that proof and you have not provided any.

So having said that, you have the power to retract that ban. Are you planning to do that anytime soon?

Secretary BLINKEN. We will do it on—based on the facts.

Ms. SALAZAR. When?

Secretary BLINKEN. I cannot——
Ms. Salazar. That’s what I’m saying. The fact—we have been asking for you to prove to us, Chairman McCall and myself, to provide the evidence that proves that the Dominican Republic government is affecting African Americans and you guys have not provided anything.

Secretary Blinken. We’ll look to see what information we have that we could share.

Ms. Salazar. You do not have any because I’ve been asking you and you have not provided, meaning you, your department.

Secretary Blinken. Again, these determinations are made and we worked with the government of the Dominican Republic to try to address them.

Ms. Salazar. By when do you think that you will make a decision whether to keep the ban or to retract it?

Secretary Blinken. It depends entirely on facts whether——

Ms. Salazar. There are no facts?

Secretary Blinken. Well, there are facts. The decision was made——

Ms. Salazar. OK. Why do not we do something? Why do not you then provide to Chairman McCaul and myself the facts that prove to you, to the State Department, that the Dominican Republic is really affecting African Americans. Can we——

Secretary Blinken. By the way, it’s also not a travel ban. It’s an alert. An alert means people should——

Ms. Salazar. It has the same effect, my friend.

Secretary Blinken. Well——

Ms. Salazar. It’s affecting a lot of people. It’s affecting that government.

Secretary Blinken. There were multiple—there were multiple cases of concern, which I’ll make sure we share with you.

Ms. Salazar. Please do. Could you please share that with us? Could you commit that we will be given proof?

Secretary Blinken. We will share the cases of concerns that raised this issue.

Ms. Salazar. Thank you. Let’s go to Cuba.

There are rumors that the United States is preparing to remove Cuba from their list of terrorist States. That would mean that the Cuban regime would then have a series of—more ability to borrow money, to gain oxygen for their repressive apparatus.

Is the State Department planning to remove Cuba from the list of terrorist States, yes or no?

Secretary Blinken. We are not planning to remove them from the list.

Ms. Salazar. Good.

Secretary Blinken. Let me just be very clear.

Ms. Salazar. Yes?

Secretary Blinken. As you know, there is no automatic or required review. There are a number of members who have been interested in this question. The law provides very clear criteria to rescind designations. There is an extremely high bar to do that.

Ms. Salazar. OK. So do you think that up to this hour Cuba has met or not met that high bar?

Secretary Blinken. As we speak, it clearly has not.
Ms. SALAZAR. Good. So that means that we—you commit right now in public under oath that the State Department is not planning to remove Cuba from the list of terror States?

Secretary BLINKEN. What I commit to is to the—if there is to be such a review it will be based on the law and based on the criteria in the law established by Congress and, as I said, it’s a very high bar.

Ms. SALAZAR. Good. So then I interpret that you are not thinking of doing that in the near future. Thank you.

Now, let’s go to Argentina. You know that there is a Chinese military satellite station in Argentina. Chinese military satellite station—that sounds really scary, you know, because I’m sure that the Chinese are not looking at the stars. All right.

So last month, your assistant secretary told me that he had never heard of it and we’re talking about the size of 500 football fields in Patagonia. So in 2019—I mean, a few years ago, the Pentagon said that that base was a threat. No kidding. It’s the Chinese military satellite station in our hemisphere. Do you know anything about it?

Secretary BLINKEN. I’m happy to followup with you on that and, of course, I wasn’t—

Ms. SALAZAR. What do you mean? You got—

Secretary BLINKEN. Of course, I was not here in 2019. So I’m not aware of what was—

Ms. SALAZAR. No, I understand. But you are now the head of the State Department and we’re talking about a satellite station right there next to us in this same hemisphere.

Secretary BLINKEN. So we’re focused around the world, including in our own hemisphere, on any concerns that we have about the placement of—

Ms. SALAZAR. Sir, I’m asking you have you spoken with the Argentinians. Because you know something? The Argentinians cannot even walk into that. Could you imagine having a Chinese military satellite station in Argentina and the Argentinian government cannot even visit it? What do you think the Chinese are doing?

Secretary BLINKEN. I welcome following up with you.

Ms. SALAZAR. Cupcakes? So what can we do above this?

Secretary BLINKEN. I welcome following up with you. Thank you. Ms. SALAZAR. Say that again, sir.

Secretary BLINKEN. I welcome following up with you on that.

Ms. SALAZAR. Please do. Thank you, sir. I think my time has expired to your benefit. Thanks.

Chairman McCaul. Let me say we’re—the Secretary has to 1:30. I think maybe a little bit longer, with the other hearing at 2 that you have.

But I would ask, we cannot get UC from the minority to limit questions to 3 minutes. So but I would ask that everybody try to be as brief as possible so I can get to all the members.

The chair recognizes Mr. Stanton.

Mr. STANTON. Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Secretary, thank you for being here today. There are several topics I’d like to cover in the short amount of time but let me start with a simple thank you.
Brittany Griner is an important part of the Arizona community, someone I know well. She’s a friend of mine and I want to thank the President, the team at the State Department, the SPIHA team, as well as you personally, Mr. Secretary, for your commitment to securing her return to the United States.

My staff worked closely with your team throughout the process and I cannot say enough about SPIHA’s professionalism and commitment to returning wrongfully detained Americans and I am truly in awe. And as we both know, there are many more wrongfully detained Americans abroad, including Paul Whelan, and I’m fully committed to supporting you and SPIHA to giving you the tools to work toward the return of our fellow citizens.

My first question is about Afghanistan. Mr. Secretary, I’m sure you know better than anyone that one of the most important things our Nation needs and you need personally when carrying out our diplomatic mission is credibility.

When we issue a guarantee we better deliver, and we have an obligation to take care of those who helped protect our Nation’s security. Two weeks ago, this committee heard about the continued struggles facing our Afghan allies, including those who worked alongside American forces and risked their own lives to keep Americans safe.

I’ve been working with a group of about 50 Afghan women called the Female Tactical Platoon that was embedded with our cultural support teams and other units and they’ve run into many problems in trying to secure their status here in the United States.

The clock is ticking. If we do not secure their permanent legal status soon not only will we have fallen short on our commitment to do what’s right but I fear it will be remembered by the next group of people we ask to help us.

Can we count on your personal involvement, working with Congress and other parts of the Administration, to secure the legal status of our Afghan allies?

Secretary BLINKEN. Yes, and I very much support the Afghan Adjustment Act. We need to— we need to do that.

Mr. STANTON. Mr. Secretary, I want to turn now to fentanyl. Many people think of this as strictly a law enforcement issue. But as you know there’s an important diplomatic connection because our ability to fight the epidemic in our own country relies on our cooperation from other countries.

Much of the chemicals used to make fentanyl that comes across our border originate in China. Cooperation on that issue with China began to deteriorate in 2019 under the previous Administration and it has continued on that path since.

There have been challenges with Mexico as well. President Lopez Obrador dropped all drug enforcement cooperation with the United States during the last Administration and he continues to be a difficult partner.

Drug trafficking and the violence wrought by drug cartels is an important issue to me not only as a member of this committee but as a representative from Arizona and I believe there is an important need for diplomatic efforts to see a meaningful impact.
Mr. Secretary, how is the State Department using diplomatic pressure to regain Mexico and China’s cooperation in stopping the flow of drugs?

Secretary BLINKEN. With regard to Mexico, because this is at the very top of our agenda for all the reasons that we have already discussed in terms of the number-one threat that it poses to Americans, last year we agreed with Mexico to develop a joint synthetic drug action plan to expand cooperation with Mexico to deal with the problem of fentanyl production and transit from Mexico, bringing in not just law enforcement, which is obviously critical, but things like the health and trade and regulatory agencies because when it comes to illegal—legal precursors going to illicit use it’s important to bring them in as well.

We have stood that up. We have seen in Mexico over the last year a record number of seizures when it comes to fentanyl. We have seen a record number of disruptions of the places where fentanyl is produced.

But it also goes to the point that there is a sea of this stuff, and as you know very well—as members of the committee know very well, you can produce it in a room the size of the corner of this hearing room.

So it’s a massive effort. But the Mexicans are engaged in that because we have restored our diplomacy and engagement with them. They’re putting more police resources into it as well.

I mentioned earlier the importance of the technology that’s being deployed to the ports of entry at the border where 95 percent of the fentanyl is coming into the United States through those legal ports of entry. The technology that we have to screen for it is effective and we need to get more of it out there as soon as possible. I know we’re working on it.

And then, more broadly, internationally. As I mentioned earlier, for the first time I was able to get on the agenda of the G–20, the 20 largest economies in the world, including China, fentanyl and synthetic opioids as an issue that we need to work together.

We’ll be establishing a working group in the G–20 on this, and in my own engagements with China this has been very much at the top of the agenda. We need their cooperation one way or another on this. I hope that they will come to actually cooperating.

If not, we’ll have to look at other actions that we can take to elicit more cooperation, particularly when it comes to the diversion of licit precursors into illicit use.

Mr. STANTON. Thank you, Mr. Secretary. I yield back.

Chairman McCaul. The chair recognizes Mr. Huizenga.

Mr. HUIZENGA. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Secretary Blinken, over here. Before I get into my questioning, I am compelled to say something about Afghanistan. I actually represent one of those Marines who was injured at Abbey Gate.

We owe these veterans and their families a deep explanation about what had happened there. I, too, agree that we have not satisfactorily and this Administration has not satisfactorily addressed that. I concur with what the chairman had said on that.

Now I want to turn to the border. Lots of focus on the southern border. I want to talk about the northern border, and those of us from Michigan, the eastern border—quite frankly, the Great Lakes.
Recently, myself and my democratic colleague Brian Higgins led a number of colleagues in on a letter regarding Great Lakes—from the Great Lakes Task Force requesting President Biden urged his Canadian counterparts to increase their share of funding into a lot of the efforts that have gone into Great Lakes.

Quality—there is a Great Lakes Water Quality agreement and 1954 convention on the Great Lakes fisheries, which obligate both Canada and the United States to provide funding for the Great Lakes.

Fiscal year 2024 the United States has through the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative an authorized level of $425 million. By comparison, the government of Canada committed just $32.97 million, just under $33 million, between 2017 and 2022 combined. So that’s 5 years they’ve done $33 billion.

The letter is requesting that the President pursue this with his counterpart, Justin Trudeau, and I want to know if you have an expectation that the President will fulfill that request and also I need to know about you and your commitment to doing that.

Secretary BLINKEN. Yes and yes, and I can tell you that we have been discussing this with the Canadians and your timing, Congressman, couldn’t be better because as you probably know we’re actually leaving this evening——

Mr. HUIZENGA. Yes.

Secretary BLINKEN [continuing]. For Canada——

Mr. HUIZENGA. Yes.

Secretary BLINKEN [continuing]. And I can assure you that will be on the agenda.

Mr. HUIZENGA. I’m very aware. I actually happened to—I might be new to the committee but I’m not new to the issues. I’ve been chair of the U.S.-Canada Interparliamentary Group for a number of terms now. I also want to—sticking to our friends in the north but expand that a little bit. I want to talk about the Arctic and the Arctic Council.

The Arctic Council came into being in 1996. It’s the eight countries that touch the Arctic Circle and above—U.S., Canada, Russia, Norway, Denmark through Greenland, Finland, Sweden, and Iceland.

There is something in the Ottawa Declaration that States explicitly, quote, “The Arctic Council should not deal with matters related to military security,” close quote.

Yet, Russia has increased military presence and operations in the Arctic and responding actions by the militaries of other Arctic States are one source of competition and tension that has come to the Arctic.

According to the BBC, Russia under Putin envisions a toll road of sorts to transit across the Northern Sea route that would transit goods and energy from Asia ports to ports in Europe. As part of that he has militarized and nuclearized the Arctic to ensure his chips.

Requiring access would have to rely on Russia’s icebreaking escort and we have seen more aggressive military behavior by Russia in that area. Additionally, also according to the BBC, in February 2023 Canada’s military has said it discovered evidence of Chinese
surveillance efforts in the Arctic. These were buoys that they believe China had dropped in there.

Is it time to, one, reexamine what that partner agencies and those partners in the Arctic, those allies, how we interact with them? And then as you know, you know, after the Russian invasion that the work of was sort of paused. I'm wanting to know what the State Department and this Administration plans to do to address those issues.

Secretary BLINKEN. Yes. I really, really appreciate that. I actually took part in an Arctic Council meeting my first year on this job. We are committed to and we have a strategy that we put out last October, which if you haven't seen I commend to you and happy to further discussion on that.

Look, our goal—shared goal—is to do whatever we can with the other countries to try to preserve the Arctic as a peaceful, stable, prosperous, and cooperative place. But if there are challenges to that, to its peaceful nature, obviously, we need to deal with it and we're operating in a different environment.

Mr. HUIZENGA. Understandably, we have to dance a bit with Russia because they are part of that Arctic Council. However, China has to be fourth—at the forefront of the discussion of what is happening in the Arctic as well.

My time is expiring but I look forward to continuing my conversation.

Secretary BLINKEN. Thank you.

Chairman McCaul. The chair recognizes Mr. Jackson.

Mr. JACKSON OF ILLINOIS. Thank you, Secretary Blinken, for your candor and your time and your knowledge of the issues.

In your written statements you talked about the growing conflicts, budget challenges, and great power competition. We have spent the last three and a half hours—roughly, two and a half hours talking—three and a half hours talking about the East and the West and curiously missing is the North and the South dynamics.

The world has changed greatly. Africans are one-eighth of the human race and we spent less than 1 percent of our questions talking about our relationship, going forward.

Could you please share with us your thoughts that we may be missing on the importance of Africa in the New World?

Secretary BLINKEN. I very much appreciate that. In fact, I'm just back, as you may know, from Ethiopia and Niger, my third trip to Sub-Saharan Africa as Secretary, other colleagues, including the vice president, who is almost quite literally on her way, and as you know, to reflect the importance of Africa where in 20 years, I think, we're going to have one in four people on this planet will be African.

We put out a strategy for Sub-Saharan Africa last year and, of course, we have the Africa Leaders Summit where the President convened and brought together the leaders of more than 40 countries.

We have made significant commitments and joint plans coming out of that summit. We have named a very senior diplomat, who was retired but is very well known, Johnnie Carson, to oversee the
implementation of the agreements and commitments that were made at the summit.

And we are in many ways across many issue areas really digging into building up and building out of these partnerships and that goes to a whole host of issues, some of them particularly urgent when it comes, for example, to food insecurity where we’re not only working to address immediate needs, the real focus that we’re trying to bring to this, and this is what I’ve heard from African colleagues throughout, is the strong desire for investments in their own sustainable production capacity.

And so we’re engaging not only the government but the private sector in that. I think the potential is enormous in many parts of Africa not only to be able to feed itself but actually to feed other countries with sustainable production.

We’re digging into trade and investment. Obviously, we have some existing vehicles like AGOA. That’s set to expire in 2025. I think it’s had a dramatic positive impact on the ability of African countries to trade, including with the United States, and we’re looking—we’ll look to work with Congress on that.

At the same time, there’s a free trade area of Africa that is now standing up. That’s a hugely important thing because we have had this abnormal situation where in the absence of these connections among African countries, African countries were doing more trade with countries outside of Africa than they were doing with each other.

That will help right the balance and also create greater opportunities for investment from the United States because you’ll have markets that are tied together.

We’re working on that with infrastructure—the infrastructure investments that we’re making including with the Global Partnership on Infrastructure Investment, many of whose projects will be focused in Africa, are going to do that and to connect countries together.

We have the Millennium Challenge Corporation that’s invested in, I think, very significant ways to help, again, African trade and investment move forward. Just as I said, in Ethiopia we have had work there, but in Niger, one of the poorest countries in Africa, actually the MCC Compacts are making a huge difference, for example, paving more than 300 kilometers of roads, working to connect Benin and Niger so that there’s more of a common ability to trade and more of a common market between them.

There’s a lot to be said about this. I really welcome following up, particularly the work of the Africa Leaders Summit.

Mr. JACKSON OF ILLINOIS. Yes. And two other parts of that is one is the 43 out of the 54 African leaders were in Russia this past week and so when you talk about new alliances and competition for the new market they are actively seeking that relationship.

But the last question I’d like to put on to you is that for the—well, it’s probably just a statement—that I think we lose credibility in the eyes of the world community when we let Haiti be so close and yet we’re so far and distant from them—that to have the most powerful nation with the poorest nation right at our border, right at our footstool.
We are an ally of Haiti. They’ve been a creditor to us. They helped us in past wars in Savannah. I would like to know that we can unilaterally move in like we have done in other countries without a host of cooperation would help Haiti gain their independence and truly cement their democracy.

Secretary BLINKEN. Thank you.

Chairman McCaul. The chair recognizes Mr. Hill.

Mr. Hill. Mr. Chairman, thank you. Mr. Secretary, thank you for being here. Grateful for your participation.

I want to talk on Syria. It’s the 12th anniversary of the start of the Syrian civil war. The crimes against humanity and war crimes committed by the Assad regime, Russia, and Iran are well known and indisputable, and I’m deeply concerned that the Administration has not been even more robust in countering the creeping normalization in the diplomatic community to the Assad regime.

Mr. Secretary, does the Biden Administration support normalizing relations with Assad?

Secretary BLINKEN. We do not.

Mr. Hill. Have you issued a demarche to those countries that you think are romancing diplomatic relations?

Secretary BLINKEN. We have and I have personally.

Mr. Hill. I’m concerned about the UAE, Bahrain, Algeria, Oman, Egypt. Visited for the first time since 2011. So have they all been spoken to?

Secretary BLINKEN. They have including by me directly.

Mr. Hill. Thank you, Mr. Secretary.

I think this is very, very important. I think we send the wrong message. Let me stick on Syria as the topic and talk about H.R. 6265, the CAPTAGON Act, which was included in last year’s National Defense Authorization Committee. It requires an interagency strategy to be developed with the State Department in the lead to target, disrupt, degrade Assad’s production and trafficking of captagon. You’re familiar with this?

Secretary BLINKEN. I am. In fact, we’re working on that strategy and we’ll submit a report on it.

Mr. Hill. Do you believe Syria meets the definition of being a major illicit drug-producing country or major drug transit country under the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961?

Secretary BLINKEN. I’d need to come back to you on the exact definition. But what I can safely say is that the regime Hezbollah are clearly a threat to stability, public health, rule of law by way of the trafficking, notably of captagon. So this is something we’re deeply concerned about. I cannot tell you without looking at it——

Mr. Hill. I understand that.

Well, Senator Marshall and Representative Boyle and I wrote you last July about this urging you to take a position on that.

We never got an answer from you in writing but we did get your answer in September when the President did not add Syria as a major drug producing or drug transit country. I encourage that to be done this year. I think we are overwhelmed with captagon poisoning people throughout the Gulf States, another reason why I do not understand diplomatic relations by the Gulf with Syria.
We have 150 examples of captagon seizures in the region between January 2022 and the date of our letter and 200 more between January and the date of the Presidential determination.

I'd like to submit that letter, Mr. Chairman, for the record.

Secretary BLINKEN. And also happy to come back to you on that, Congressman.

Chairman McCaul. Without objection.

[The information referred to follows:]
March 8, 2023

President Biden:

As members of the Great Lakes Task Force, we write to underscore the importance of the Great Lakes to the United States and Canada, as well as the shared commitment that both our nations must uphold to support the Great Lakes. We encourage you to highlight the importance of this binational resource, the investments needed to restore and protect the Great Lakes during your official visit to Canada, as well as support for our binational institutions that promote the environmental and economic health of our region.

The Great Lakes contain one-fifth of the world’s fresh surface water, providing drinking water for more than 30 million Americans and Canadians, supporting a $6 trillion regional economy, and providing habitat for a host of fish and wildlife. Through partnerships between the United States and Canada, sustained investments are critical to clean up toxic Areas of Concern, address the threat of invasive species, restore habitats, reduce harmful algal blooms, and mitigate other threats to the Great Lakes.

The Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement and the 1954 Convention on Great Lakes Fisheries obligates both countries to provide funding for the Great Lakes. The United States has consistently provided substantial investments into the Great Lakes’ health and water quality, administered principally through the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI). The GLRI has received more than $400 million, on average, over the last five years to carry out this important work.

We appreciate your support of the Great Lakes and encourage you to emphasize the importance of our binational institutions and investments for the Great Lakes from the Canadian government. This will be essential to supporting the health of this treasured natural resource, which is critical to both our nations.

Sincerely,
MEMBERS OF CONGRESS

CC: The Honorable David Cohen, U.S. Ambassador to Canada
Mr. HILL. Thank you. And just recently, February 2023, in UAE 4.5 million captagon pills interdicted. So I think this is of concern. I hope you'll look forward to working with you on that strategy. Do you have a date when that strategy might be available?

Secretary BLINKEN. I cannot give you a date. I can tell you we're actively working on it and we'll submit it, and I'll come back to your office with——

Mr. HILL. Come back to my office, if you would, say, between now and 1st of May and let me know where you stand on this. That would be very helpful.

Secretary BLINKEN. Thank you.

Mr. HILL. Let me yield the gentleman, Mr. James, the balance of my time, and I yield to him.

Mr. JAMES. Thank you, Mr. Hill.

Before I start, I want to thank the Administration for extending humanitarian parole for Ukrainians. I have a large Ukrainian community in my district and I applaud this. Thank you, Mr. Secretary.

My first question—in 2016, the Obama Administration recognized the genocide occurring against Iraqi Christians and other minorities. The Trump Administration followed by fighting to preserve the full religious rights of all individuals, including Christians, to practice their cultural and beliefs.

I implore you, sir, to make sure that the Biden Administration ensures that the rights and freedoms of Iraqi minorities are protected. Will you raise, please, the issue of religious persecution of the Iraqi Christians with Prime Minister Al Sudani at your next available opportunity?

Secretary BLINKEN. Yes, I will, and I could not agree with you more and this is something that I was seized with. You mentioned the Obama Administration's determination. This is something I worked on then and we will absolutely keep a focus on.

Mr. JAMES. Thank you, sir.

Secretary BLINKEN. Thank you for raising it.

Mr. JAMES. Second question. As chair of the Africa Subcommittee I believe that Africa has many, many opportunities not just for the people on the continent but for the world and particularly America.

On the continent, however, the Chinese Communist Party is deploying exploitation and political influence campaigns to access key natural resources that would threaten both our supply chains and national security.

I am deeply concerned about the items particularly produced by slave labor in our supply chain. Would you, sir, be open to working with me on legislation to create a 21st century national strategy to strengthen our domestic industrial base and restore our critical minerals, one, and two, a bill to remove slavery from our supply chain, Mr. Secretary?

Secretary BLINKEN. Yes and yes. We have a number of initiatives that are already moving forward. We happily both share that with you and listen to your thoughts both on—certainly, on the supply chain piece, and second, when it comes to slavery and modern slavery we want to eliminate that whenever and wherever it is occurring. We'd welcome working with you on that.

Mr. JAMES. Thank you, Mr. Secretary. I yield.
Chairman McCaul. The Secretary has to appear before the Appropriations Committee and so we want—
Secretary Blinken. Much less important than this committee.
Chairman McCaul. No, if you want to stay——
Secretary Blinken. Nonetheless.
Chairman McCaul. OK. All right. All right. Just thought I'd make the offer. So I apologize to the members that we did not get to but you may submit your questions in writing for the Secretary and he will respond.
So pursuant to committee rules, all members may have 5 days to submit statements, questions, materials for the record.
Without objection, the committee stands adjourned.
[Whereupon, at 1:38 p.m., the committee was adjourned.]
TO: MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS

You are respectfully requested to attend an OPEN hearing of the Committee on Foreign Affairs to be held in room 210 of the House Visitor’s Center. The hearing is available by live webcast on the Committee website at https://foreignaffairs.house.gov/.

DATE: Thursday, March 23, 2023
TIME: 10:00 a.m.
LOCATION: HVC-210

SUBJECT: The State of American Diplomacy in 2023: Growing Conflicts, Budget Challenges, and Great Power Competition

WITNESS: The Honorable Antony Blinken
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State

By Direction of the Chair

The Committee on Foreign Affairs seeks to make its facilities accessible to persons with disabilities. If you are in need of special accommodations, please call 202-225-4147 at least four business days in advance of the event, whenever practicable. Questions with regard to special accommodations in general (including availability of Committee materials in alternative formats and assistive listening devices) may be directed to the Committee.
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COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS
MINUTES OF FULL COMMITTEE HEARING

Day: Thursday    Date: March 23    Room: HVC-210
Starting Time: 10:23    Ending Time: 13:38

Note: Red boxes with red type will NOT print.

Presiding Member(s)
Chairman McCaul, Ranking Member Menkin

Check all of the following that apply:
Open Session [x]    Executive (closed) Session [ ]
Electronically Recorded (tape) [x]    Stenographic Record [x]
Television [x]

To fill out the form online, either use the tab key to move through each field or mouse click each field or within blue box. Type in information.

TITLE OF HEARING:
THE STATE OF AMERICAN DIPLOMACY IN 2023: GROWING CONFLICTS, BUDGET CHALLENGES, AND GREAT POWER COMPETITION

COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:
Attached

NON-COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:
N/A

HEARING WITNESSES: Same as meeting notice attached? Yes [ ]    No [x]
(If "no," please list below and include title, agency, department, or organization.)

STATMENTS FOR THE RECORD: (List any statements submitted for the record.)
Attached.

Castro, Connolly, Hultgren, Issa, McCaul, Wilson

TIME SCHEDULED TO RECONVENE
or
TIME ADJOURNED 13:38

Note: Please include accompanying witnesses with their titles, etc. (please note the fact that they are accompanying witnesses.)

Meg Wagner
Full Committee Hearing Coordinator
STATEMENT FOR THE RECORD SUBMITTED FROM REPRESENTATIVE CONNOLLY


HFAC Full Committee Hearing
10:00 AM, Thursday, March 23, 2023
HVC-210
Rep. Gerald E. Connolly (D-VA)

The third budget request of President Biden’s first term represents a vigorous effort over multiple congressional sessions to repair the damage the previous administration inflicted on the credibility and reputation of the United States. President Trump oversaw the signing of a flawed deal with the Taliban, withdrawal from the Iran Nuclear Deal, Paris Climate Agreement, Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), the World Health Organization (WHO) during a pandemic, and the weakening of our ironclad commitment to our NATO Allies. In a departure from this great American withdrawal, President Biden has charted a path back to dignity and respect, using NATO as the arsenal of democracy to counteract the global march towards autocracy.

After two years, we can say the Biden administration has made tremendous progress to put that sad chapter of American history behind us and undo the immense damage wrought by the previous administration. But we must do more. The wreckage of the Trump administration will not be cleared overnight. We can continue to build back better by enacting an International Affairs budget that recommit to our allies, actively promotes the protection and expansion of democracy and human rights around the world, and embraces multilateral engagement to meet and combat global challenges, including global health security, human rights, Russian aggression, and the rise of China.

Most importantly, the Biden administration has brought our NATO allies together to respond forcefully to Russia’s illegal and unprovoked war in Ukraine. Since January 2021, the United States has committed more than $32 billion in security assistance, and, as the largest single-country donor of humanitarian assistance, Congress has already appropriated $9.9 billion in humanitarian assistance and $15.1 billion in financial support to demonstrate our enduring and steadfast commitment to Ukraine’s sovereignty and territorial integrity. After the previous President repeatedly cast aspersions on the importance of the NATO alliance, it is nothing short of extraordinary what the current administration has done to work in lockstep with our allies to provide urgent humanitarian and security assistance, while implementing one of the most comprehensive and wide-reaching sanctions regimes ever enforced to weaken the oligarchs and close confidants of Putin’s kleptocracy.

We currently face an alarming global rise in authoritarianism and extremism that must not be ignored. I am proud to lead many colleagues along with Representatives Wagner in a letter advocating for the full funding of democracy programs and the National Endowment of Democracy (NED) in FY24. As the outgoing President of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly, my top priority was to reinvigorate the founding values of the alliance: democracy, individual liberty and the Rule of Law as asserted in the Washington Treaty. To that end, I continue to advocate for the establishment of a Center for Democratic Resilience within NATO to acknowledge that NATO is not just another military bloc – it is a coalition of nations committed to shared democratic values. As the United States strengthens our commitment to NATO, I urge President Biden to advance his ambitious pro-democracy agenda by supporting the creation of this Center.

President Biden and Secretary Blinken still have their work cut out for them in attempting to repair our global standing and restore our ties with allies and international organizations. House Republicans have submitted a budget proposal that follows President Trump’s foreign policy doctrine, which was rooted in
the abandonment of American values, the dissolution of multilateral agreements and partnerships, and the neglect of diplomacy and development as our first lines of defense. President Biden’s budget takes the United States one step closer to returning the United States to its role as a beacon of hope and I am eager to offer what assistance I can to reinvigorate U.S. global leadership and engagement.
Secret War
How the U.S. Uses Partnerships and Proxy Forces to Wage War Under the Radar
By Katherine Yoebright • Published November 3, 2022

Brennan Center for Justice at New York University School of Law
eligible for the provision of collective self-defense. That same year, Congress obligated the Department of Defense to submit a report discussing § 333 and "the domestic and international legal bases for the use of United States military personnel to provide collective self-defense in support of designated foreign partner forces." The following year, Congress obligated the Department of Defense to provide the defense committees with a report outlining its policy for exercising collective self-defense. And in 2021, Congress obligated the Department of Defense to provide it with "monthly briefings outlining . . . the use of military force under the notion of collective self-defense of foreign partners."

The Department of Defense's compliance with these reporting and notification requirements has been lackluster. Congress has repeatedly had to amend its requirements to demand more information, and members have complained about the Department of Defense's lack of transparency. In a 2019 hearing, Rep. Rick Larsen asserted that the department had not "complied consistently" with § 1301(f), failing both the timing and contents of § 1301 notifications. That same year, Rep. Jason Crow asked the secretary of defense why the department had "not fulfilled its obligation and submitted the congressionally mandated report" covering § 333 and collective self-defense. In 2021, Congress contemplated withholding part of the Department of Defense's funding until it submitted an overdue report on collective self-defense.

Even if the Department of Defense regularly complied with these reporting and notification requirements, relevant lawmakers — to say nothing of the public — would still be excluded from conversations about when, where, and against whom the United States uses force. The law directs the Department of Defense to disclose information only to the "congressional defense committees," a term that omits the House and Senate committees on foreign affairs. Thus, the congressional overseers with shared responsibility for § 333 and primary responsibility for declaring war and authorizing the use of force would still lack critical information regarding the extent of the Department of Defense's hostilities.

Only one of the War Powers Resolution, is designed to provide information about the Department of Defense's actual and anticipated hostilities to all of Congress and, in turn, the public. Section 6(c)(d) of that law requires the president to notify the speaker of the House and president pro tempore of the Senate within 48 hours of any unauthorized introduction of U.S. forces into "hostilities" or situations leading to "imminent involvement in hostilities."

But presidents have largely ignored § 6(c)(d). As early as the Reagan administration, which failed to disclose hostilities in El Salvador and Nicaragua, presidents have refused to submit required reports. Noncompliance has worsened since the war on terror began. Between 1993 and 2004, presidents submitted 20 reports on unilateral military action. In the two decades since 2001, despite the greatly increased U.S. military footprint, presidents have submitted just 12 reports. None of these reports discloses acts of unit or collective self-defense undertaken by U.S. forces deployed on § 333 or other training assignments. The last § 4620D report on activity in the Philippines was submitted in 1989, when President George H.W. Bush dispatched U.S. forces in response to a coup attempt in the country.

The absence of § 4620D reports reflects a deliberate choice. Executive branch lawyers have defined "hostilities," the circumstances that trigger the War Powers Resolution, in a way that excludes much of modern warfare. For instance, they argue that "espionage, military or paramilitary attacks," as well as instances in which U.S. forces are "simply acting in self-defense," fall outside the scope of the law. There is no textual basis for this interpretation, and the legislative history tends to contradict it. But it has allowed successive administrations to avoid congressional oversight, seemingly without penalty.

By not reporting on hostilities that fall short of "full military engagements," the White House and the Department of Defense have presented much of Congress — and the public — from understanding the risks that inhere in the § 333 authority. Without such an understanding, these risks will continue to go unaddressed.

10 U.S.C. § 127e: Surrogate Forces to Counter Terrorism

The year before Congress enacted § 333, it passed 10 U.S.C. § 127e, an authority at the center of controversy regarding the geographic reach of the war on terror. Section 127e states:

The Secretary of Defense may . . . expend up to $800,000,000 during any fiscal year to provide support to foreign forces, irregular forces, groups, or individuals engaged in supporting or facilitating ongoing military operations by United States special operations forces to combat terrorism.

The statutory language is no model of clarity. Key terms are undefined, as § 127e neither enumerates nor limits the types of "support" that can be provided to or expected from partner forces. Moreover, the provision is circular: by its text, § 127e permits U.S. forces to "support" partner forces who are "supporting" U.S. forces.

As vague and convoluted as § 127e may be, three parts of the provision gesture toward the authority's purpose and
use. First and most obvious, § 127e programs must contribute to U.S. efforts to combat terrorism. Unlike § 333, which can be used for a variety of purposes across state and nonterrorist contexts, § 127e requires partner forces to be "engaged in" supporting ongoing counterterrorism work. Second, § 127e programs must advance "authorized ongoing military operations" by U.S. forces. In other words, U.S. forces must already be pursuing permissible military objectives in a country before a § 127e program can be established. Furthermore, partner forces must be pursuing these objectives as well. This is a substantial departure from § 333, which is not predicated on U.S. forces conducting operations and instead builds the capacity of partner forces to achieve their own military objectives.

Third, § 127e permits the Department of Defense to partner with any state or nonstate actor, including private individuals. This, too, distinguishes § 127e from § 333, which limits support to formal national security forces.

Altogether, the text allows the Department of Defense to recruit foreign individuals or groups to assist U.S. forces in achieving U.S. counterterrorism objectives that are authorized under other laws. It does not provide any independent authority for the Department of Defense to pursue additional counterterrorism objectives. Reflecting this understanding, Department of Defense officials have characterized § 127e in public statements as a funding or training and advisory authority rather than an authorization for use of military force.

Still, questions abound as to what kind of support the Department of Defense provides and receives under § 127e, as well as whether the Department of Defense sends partner forces on missions that U.S. forces have no authority to undertake themselves. And, as with § 333, there is a risk that U.S. forces will invoke unit or collective self-defense when working with § 127e partners. These questions and risks are all the more pressing given the inadequate oversight regime for § 127e programs.

Section 127e in Practice and the Potential for Unauthorized Hostilities

The origins of § 127e date back to the early years of the war on terror. The Department of Defense quickly realized that U.S. forces lacked the cultural competence and local knowledge necessary for locating and combating al-Qaeda and other terrorist forces in Afghanistan. Furthermore, the department lacked the legal authority to induce Afghans to fill these gaps.

Not so for the CIA. The Department of Defense enlisted the CIA to pay Afghans to support and even conduct U.S. operations. But the two agencies had diverging mandates and priorities, and in 2002, the Department of Defense began drafting a legislative proposal that would empower it to pay local groups and individuals directly.

Out of the gate, the proposal was controversial. Some officials worried that it would enable U.S. forces to develop paramilitary groups without oversight. Nevertheless, the proposal advanced. In 2004, the Department of Defense made it a top legislative priority, sending Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld to lobby Congress for its adoption. Based on the department’s aggressive advocacy, Congress enacted § 127e, originally known as the § 1208 authority.

From that point onward, Department of Defense officials would refer to § 127e as “the single most important authority we have in our fight against terrorism.” They would also, as some had feared, use the authority to create shadowy proxy forces around the world. A Department of Defense official referred to § 127e programs as a part of their “by-wire approach” — an approach they define as “led by our partners, state or nonstate, with enabling support from U.S. forces, and through U.S. authorities and partner agreements.” They refer to missions undertaken as part of § 127e programs as “advise, assist, accompany” missions. But “by-wire through” fails to fully convey the approach behind § 127e programs. The programs do not provide mere enabling support to partner forces. Instead, they allow the United States to recruit the partner forces, train them, equip them, sustain them, and pay their salaries. Nor do § 127e programs involve operations led by partner forces in any meaningful sense. Fundamentally, § 127e programs seek to develop surrogate forces who pursue military objectives chosen by U.S. forces. In interviews with Politico, current and former Department of Defense personnel described “directing” partner forces and having them do “our bidding.”

Similarly, “advise, assist, accompany” fails to capture the extent of U.S. involvement in running missions with § 127e partner forces. Department of Defense policies permit U.S. forces to integrate with partner forces at “all phases” of an “advise, assist, accompany mission.” From “advise and assist” missions, with no “accompany” component, allow U.S. forces to join partner forces in the field until the moment of final assault. Whether U.S. forces fully participate in a mission or are tasked with staying at the last covered and concealed position, they can end up in direct combat. In 2017, U.S. forces took casualties on what the Pentagon characterized as an “advise and assist” mission in Somalia. And the International Crisis Group documented a 2017 mission in Cameroon in which U.S. forces, though stationed 300 meters behind their partner forces, ended up shooting and killing an adversary.

In short, § 127e programs have involved creating partner forces, controlling them, and at times engaging in combat through and alongside them. Given that § 127e is not an authorization for use of military force, this raises the question of what legal authority justifies these actions. After all, § 127e programs must support “authorized ongoing military operations.” For several reasons, however, § 127e
programs can result in U.S. forces engaging in military operations that they could not—or simply would not—undertake under existing authorities.

The contours of operations conducted through and with § 127e partners are established by executive orders, or EXORDIs. EXORDIs are orders to initiate and conduct military operations, issued at the direction of the secretary of defense or the president. They are akin to agency rules, as far as they have the force of law and implement relevant statutory or constitutional frameworks. EXORDIs may allow U.S. forces to engage in combat in a particular area, against a particular adversary, or under particular circumstances, in furtherance of either an authorization for use of military force or self-defense. Alternatively, they may limit U.S. forces to influencing a situation without firing weapons.

As a legal matter, EXORDIs cannot themselves serve as an authorization for the use of force. In practice, though, there is reason for concern that they are serving as de facto authorizations. Many EXORDIs do not specify the authority under which they are promulgated, and many are “very broad and very brief in their descriptions.” A Department of Defense official explained that “meaningless” EXORDI language can make it “very difficult” to ensure that U.S. forces and their § 127e partners are pursuing lawful targets, particularly when there are multiple terrorist groups, some covered by the 2001 AUMF and some not, operating in a single area.

Further complicating matters, Department of Defense officials do not always apply the limitations that EXORDIs impose on U.S. forces to their § 127e partner forces. U.S. forces have commanded partner forces in combat even when the relevant EXORDI did not authorize U.S. forces to engage in direct combat. As one former senior Department of Defense official explained, U.S. forces can use § 127e partner forces to pursue objectives when they “don’t have authorities to have people on the ground and operating in a specific geographical location.”

This misalignment is problematic because the limitations contained in EXORDIs may reflect a lack of legal authorization—for instance, restrictions on which groups, if any, forces can lawfully engage in combat. The reason for the EXORDI limitation, however, might not be explained in the order itself. U.S. forces might think that the limitation stems from a host country agreement or political considerations, not the inapplicability of the 2001 AUMF to constitutional self-defense. U.S. forces might then assume that they have the authority to engage in indirect combat through their § 127e partner forces. Nothing in the EXORDI would indicate whether they are right or wrong.

Overall, the implementation of § 127e’s “authorized ongoing military operations” requirement has troubled congressional overseers. One staffer lamented that the Department of Defense “seems to work backwards,” using § 127e as the basis for operations rather than using operations as the basis for § 127e activity. Another explained that the proliferation of § 127e programs had prompted “a lot of discussions” about whether U.S. forces are relying on appropriate authorities. The staffer insisted that “there would not be a legal basis to have a partner force take action if U.S. forces would not be legally authorized to take that action.”

This contradicts numerous Department of Defense officials understanding that § 127e partners can be asked to take action beyond that permitted by the relevant EXORDI.

The use of § 127e as a de facto authorization for use of military force would explain the Department of Defense’s early work with the Punitive Security Force and the Danab Brigade in Somalia, before the 2001 AUMF covered al-Shabaab and ISIS. It would also explain the Department of Defense’s use of a § 127e program in Cameroon to pursue the leaders of Boko Haram, a terrorist group that operates in West Africa. Boko Haram has never been publicly identified as an associated force of al-Qaeda, and thus a lawful target, under the 2001 AUMF.

The breathtaking geographic reach of § 127e programs would make sense, as well, if § 127e were derived from the 2001 AUMF. Researchers and reporters have uncovered § 127e programs not only in Afghanistan and Iraq but also in Cameroon, Egypt, Kenya, Lebanon, Libya, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Somalia, Syria, Tunisia, and Yemen. Without Somalia, researchers and reporters have found § 127e programs involving military contingents from Ethiopia, Kenya, and Uganda, as well as local forces. These § 127e programs extend far beyond the list of countries for which AUMF activity has been disclosed. And it is not a complete accounting of § 127e programs. An investigative journalism has revealed that a § 127e program has been run in an Indo-Pacific country as well. That country is likely the Philippines, where U.S. forces have long combated terrorist organizations that do not fall within the scope of the 2001 AUMF.

Instead of the 2001 AUMF, § 127e programs can be based on EXORDIs implementing the president’s inherent power under the Constitution—a power that, as discussed in the context of § 1353, has been used through dubious invocations of unit and collective self-defense. One congressional overseer confirmed that § 127e activity has “most definitely” taken place on the basis of self-defense.

The use of unit or collective self-defense as the basis for a § 127e program would be concerning in its own right. It would imply that the Department of Defense has put U.S. forces in a position where unit self-defense has become necessary or collective self-defense has been used. Moreover, the Department of Defense would have done so in a place where the 2001 AUMF does not apply against some or all potential adversaries. In other words, U.S. forces would be countering their partner forces’
adversaries rather than entities that pose a threat to U.S. territory or persons. A former senior Department of Defense official confirmed that a § 127e or other training program run in a volatile area could lead to an invocation of constitutional self-defense and then to the initiation of a § 127e program.255

Countering a partner force’s adversaries by creating and controlling new partners under § 127e could double the risk of hostilities based on dubious interpretations of constitutional authority. Section 127e partner forces, like § 333 partner forces, can be eligible for collective self-defense under Department of Defense policies. This appears to be the case even for irregular forces: in September 2016, U.S. forces invoked collective self-defense to launch a strike against one of the Pontland Security Force’s rival militias.256 After investigating the strike, the Department of Defense determined that it was a legitimate use of force that had protected its partners.257

Beyond unit and collective self-defense, there is one other theory of constitutional self-defense that warrants mention: the national interest theory. As discussed above, presidents since the early 1990s have claimed and invoked an inherent authority to use force in protection of amorphous, undefined “important national interests.” Although there is no indication that this theory has been used to support § 127e programs, nothing in § 127e would prevent the implementation of a program based on this unmoored doctrine.

Finally, even in situations in which there is a plausible legal basis for military action, the United States ordinarily might refrain from military operations for a host of reasons, including resource limitations and domestic political blowback. Put simply, Americans might not want to foot the bill for new overseas military adventures or incur casualties for opaque reasons in remote locales across Africa and Asia. Section 127e allows the Department of Defense to sidestep these democratic constraints by fighting wars through proxies and doing so largely in secret. The authority lessens the actual and political costs of military action, at least in the short term, in a way that nevertheless expands U.S. operations and hostilities.

Checks and Constraints
Few safeguards exist to prevent the use of § 127e as a de facto authorization for use of military force through proxies. The test of the provision is broad and vague, and the stakeholders involved in managing other security cooperation programs — the Department of State, host countries, and Congress — are largely cut out of § 127e decision-making. Through a series of questionable legal interpretations, the Department of Defense has assumed nearly unlimited discretion to create and control partner forces.

Section 127e imposes two limitations on the Department of Defense’s ability to work with partner forces. The first, which the Department of Defense appears to respect, requires U.S. forces to run § 127e programs in support of
The § 1202 Authority: Surrogate Forces to Counter State Actors

When the Department of Defense first crafted its legislative proposal for § 1202, the authority permitted U.S. forces to provide and receive support for “unconventional warfare,” or operations involving nontraditional weapons, tactics, or adversaries. As the proposal advanced, Congress narrowed it to “combating terrorism.” But today, the Department of Defense has the authority it originally sought, in the form of the § 1202 authority.

Enacted through the 2018 NDAA and subsequently expanded and extended, § 1202 states:

> The Secretary of Defense may, with the concurrence of the relevant Chief of Mission, expend up to $50,000,000 during each fiscal year from 2023 through 2025 to provide support to foreign forces, irregular forces, groups, or individuals engaged in supporting or facilitating ongoing and authorized irregular warfare operations by United States Special Operations Forces.

This language mirrors § 1276, though it broadens the scope of permissible use to all irregular warfare operations. The definitions of “irregular warfare” in § 1202 shows how expansive the authority is. Subsection (i) stipulates that irregular warfare is “competition . . . short of traditional armed conflict.” But nontraditional conflict—sometimes referred to as hybrid warfare or gray-zone conflict—includes combat through and with surrogate forces, so long as such combat falls short of “all-out war.” As the Department of Defense explains in its National Defense Strategy, irregular warfare “may employ the full range of military capabilities and encompasses “proxy, guerrilla, and covert operations.” And these military and other capabilities may be wielded against either state or nonstate actors.

That irregular warfare includes action against foreign states is a feature, not a bug. Department of Defense officials have referred to § 1202 as “a highly useful tool for enabling irregular warfare operations . . . to deter and defeat . . . revisionist powers and rogue regimes.” They envision increasing § 1202 activity as the department begins to “prioritize[ ] great power competition.” Broadly speaking, the purpose of the § 1202 authority is to take the department’s § 1276 approach of creating and controlling partner forces and wield it against countries like China, Russia, Iran, and North Korea.

As with § 1276, however, § 1202 is not itself a basis for conducting missions. To create and control partner forces against foreign powers, the Department of Defense needs an operational authority. No authorization for use of military force clearly covers China, Russia, Iran, or North Korea. Neither the 2004 AUMF nor the 2002 AUMF, the authority for the Iraq War, has been interpreted as allowing sustained hostilities against these potential adversaries.

That leaves constitutional self-defense—including the defense of partner forces and, potentially, the defense of “national interests.” Although China, Russia, Iran, and North Korea present no clear and imminent threat to the American homeland, it is easy to see how the Department of Defense could wield constitutional self-defense against these states. The Department of Defense’s tensorial theory of collective self-defense allows U.S. forces to protect partner forces from their adversaries, regardless of whether those adversaries are ISF militants or Iran-backed militias.

As one congressional overseer suggested, a strategically placed § 333 partnership in Eastern Europe could be spun off into a § 1202 program to counter Russian threats. And, of course, coming up with a national interest to justify a § 1202 program there would be even easier.

Separately, the Department of Defense can use operational authorities to launch § 1202 programs that do not anticipate combat, whether through U.S. forces or partners. Irregular warfare encompasses “information operations,” or military efforts to “influence, disrupt, corrupt, or usurp the decision-making of adversaries and potential adversaries while protecting our own.” This can include tampering with other states’ democratic processes—as activities that the Department of Defense believes “fall below the threshold of armed conflict.”

The Department of Defense has promulgated EXORDs that reflect previous or ongoing information operations against near-peer states, such as the Ukraine Military Information Support Operations EXORD. In an April 2022 hearing, a Department of Defense official appeared to acknowledge a program under this EXORD, stating that the department had used § 1202 to “expose” malign actors and that it “can see the benefits of this § 1202 authority directly from Ukraine.” One Department of Defense official suggested that most or all § 1202 programs as of mid-2022 were information operations.

It is unclear what authorities U.S. forces rely on to conduct these information operations, though a former senior Department of Defense official offered that 10 U.S.C. § 167 could serve as the basis. This is a troubling suggestion. Section 167 simply defines the mandate and functions of special operations forces, explaining that special operations forces are part of the military responsible for “Direct action,” “Strategic reconnaiss ance,” “Unconventional Warfare,” and “Military information support operations.” Section 167 does not purport to authorize these activities. The Department of Defense recognizes this fact in the context of direct action, a term that covers kill-or-capture missions and other small-scale
offensive involving kinetic force.\textsuperscript{238} Department of Defense policies do not allow direct action without a
separate authorization for use of military force or
constitutional self-defense.\textsuperscript{239} To the extent that the
Department of Defense relies on \S 107 for its infor-
mation operations, it is claiming the ability to initiate
information operations without any specific authority or
congressional input.\textsuperscript{239}

Whether U.S. forces use \S 1202 partners to engage in
combat or to advance information operations, it is clear
that these programs risk serious consequences, up to and
including military escalation with a nuclear power. Yet, as
with \S 127e, there are few significant checks or constraints
on the \S 1202 authority. Indeed, in some ways, the limita-
tions on Department of Defense discretion are weaker
for \S 1202 than they are for \S 127e.

Because \S 1202 was designed to counter state actors,
\S 1202 programs are necessarily run without the input,
much less consent, of all states implicated. Operations in
Chinese or Russian territory, for example, would not have
the same kind of negotiated host country consent that
underlies and can set guidelines for \S 127e programs.\textsuperscript{279}
Similarly, the interagency process may be less robust for
\S 1202 than it is for \S 127e. Because the United States does not
maintain diplomatic relations with Iraq or North
Korea, there is no “relevant Chief of Mission” who can
reject or approve \S 1202 programs. The Department of
Defense’s own guidance on \S 1202 states that “written
concurrency must come from the [Chief of Mission] for
each country with which the U.S. Government maintains
diplomatic relations.”\textsuperscript{280} The guidance does not direct
the Department of Defense to secure the approval of the
secretary of state or other Department of State officials
when there is no ambassador.\textsuperscript{281}

Congressional oversight, too, is likely weaker for \S 1202
than it is for \S 127e. Recent amendments to the criteria
for \S 127e notifications—including the 2019 requirement
that notifications explain the legal basis for each program
have not been applied to \S 1202. And the notifications
and reports required by \S 1202 suffer from the same clas-
sification and distribution problems that frustrate \S 127e
oversight.\textsuperscript{282} Furthermore, the notifications and briefings
on sensitive military operations required by \S 130f are
unlikely to cover some or all \S 1202 programs, at least until
the definition of “sensitive military operations” is
expanded to cover information warfare. Perhaps realizing
the insufficiency of the \S 130f framework, Congress
recently required quarterly briefings for “significant mili-
tary operations,” defined to include “all clandestine oper-
ations in the information environment.”\textsuperscript{283} The new
framework, however, does not require notification of
information operations when they begin, and it thus does
not provide Congress with timely updates.

It should come as no surprise that congressional staffers
who have worked on \S 127e oversight and reform have little
to no visibility into how \S 1202 is interpreted and imple-
mented.\textsuperscript{284} Indeed, one staffer who is involved in \S 127e’s
oversight was surprised to learn that the parallel \S 1202
authority even exists.\textsuperscript{285} Section 1202, in short, raises the same potential as \S 127e
for hostilities that Congress has not authorized, but with
far graver consequences because the enemy could be a
powerful nation. Congress cannot allow \S 1202 to function
as a de facto authorization for use of military force against
China, Russia, Iran, North Korea, or their proxies. But under
the law as it is, Congress is ill-equipped to prevent or even
know about this kind of abuse.

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22 Brennan Center for Justice

Sacred War
ADDITIONAL MATERIALS SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD

ON DISSENT IN FOREIGN POLICY.

As the State Department’s Director of Cypriot Affairs in 1973-4 when US policy in the Cyprus-Greece-Turkey triangle collapsed, I was summoned in 1975 to testify before the Special House Committee chaired by Democrat Otis Pike on why and how this Republican diplomatic disaster happened.

Chairman Pike soon learned that I had submitted a formal Dissent Memorandum to Secretary Kissinger in August detailing precisely the matters of most interest to the Committee. From early 1974 through May I had memorialized my conviction that intelligence units of the Greek Army were planning to overthrow President Makarios and install a puppet Cypriot government under the control of Athens. I said that if this happened, I was certain that Turkey’s armed forces would invade Cyprus and establish a Turk Cypriot mini-state on Cyprus. Since this would make a shambles of our policy in the Eastern Mediterranean, I argued as strongly as I could that the US should bring maximum pressure on the Greek Junta to abandon its reckless and self-defeating intentions.

In the weeks that followed my analysis of the situation was ignored by Secretary Kissinger and senior State Department officials, as were my policy recommendations. On July 15, 1974 Greek military units on Cyprus overthrew Makarios who escaped by fleeing to a British military base. They installed as President a notorious Greek Cypriot gunman. A few weeks after that the Army of Turkey invaded and established a mini-state on the Northern third of Cyprus. As Greek Cypriots fled south and Turk Cypriots north to reach the safety of their ethnic sectors, murder and mayhem prevailed. In late August a Greek Cypriot sniper shot American Ambassador Roger Davies through the heart.

Henry Kissinger had a good reason to fight tooth and nail to suppress my Dissent and testimony. I was right about Cyprus and he was wrong. At one point D. Kissinger even claimed he could not release my memorandum because that would expose me to retribution. My response to hearing that was a shouted "Bull...!" Like every other FSO in the world I knew that any retribution would come from the State Department.

The events of 1974-5 reinforced my view that in Constitutional struggles between the executive and legislative branches over their Foreign policy roles and responsibilities, the prime directive for FSOs is to “support and defend the Constitution” rather than a particular administration or party as we have all sworn to do. That requires studying the Constitution, refusing to automatically accept the executive branch view, and paying particular attention to the legislative oversight role in the foreign policy process. Congressional oversight enhances executive responsibility and enables us to learn from the inevitable mistakes.

Ambassador (r) Tom Boyatt
Morris Tavern, Virginia
March 2023
Operation Nickel Grass was a strategic airlift operation conducted by the United States to deliver weapons and supplies to Israel during the 1973 Yom Kippur War. Over 32 days, the United States Air Force (USAF) Military Airlift Command (MAC) shipped 22,905 tons of tanks, artillery, ammunition and supplies in C-141 Starlifter and C-5 Galaxy transport aircraft between 14 October and 14 November 1973. The U.S. support helped ensure that the State of Israel survived a coordinated and surprise attack from the Soviet-backed Arab Republic of Egypt and Syrian Arab Republic.

Following a U.S. pledge of support on 19 October, the oil-exporting Arab states within the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) held to their previously declared warnings to use oil as a "weapon" and declared a complete oil embargo on the United States and restrictions on other countries. This, along with the contemporaneous failure of major pricing and production negotiations between the exporters and the major oil companies, led to the 1973 oil crisis. Policy makers in Washington learned lessons that decisively shaped subsequent American political and strategic policies especially regarding the Middle East. In addition, the operation totally transformed U.S.–Saudi relations.

Background

Israel, as well as the U.S. and most of the world, were caught by surprise on 6 October 1973 when Egypt and Syria attacked the Sinai Peninsula and the Golan Heights, respectively. The Soviet Union had supplied Egypt and Syria over 600 advanced surface-to-air missiles, 300 MIG-21 fighters, 1,200 tanks and hundreds of thousands of tons of war material. Seeing Israel's vulnerable position, Henry Kissinger, the United States Secretary of State and President Richard Nixon's National Security Adviser, made arrangements for the Israeli national airline, El Al, to pick up some items, including ammunition, "high technology products" and AIM-9 Sidewinder missiles at a U.S. naval base in Virginia. A modest effort soon began, but Kissinger still hoped to keep any visible involvement at a minimum. On 8 October, Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir authorized the assembly of thirteen 20-kiloton nuclear warheads on Jericho missiles and F-4 Phantom II, which were prepared for action against Syrian and Egyptian targets; their preparation was made easily detectable, likely as a signal to the United States. Kissinger learned of this threatening nuclear escalation on the morning of 9 October. On that same day, Meir issued a personal appeal for military assistance, which European nations declined. Nixon, however, ordered the commencement of Operation Nickel Grass, to replace all of Israel's material losses. The decision was taken the same day the Soviets began their own resupply operation of Arab forces by sea. Author Seymour Hersh claimed in 1993 that there was "anecdotal evidence" that Kissinger had told Anwar Sadat that the reason for the U.S. airlift was that
the Israelis were close to "going nuclear."

In subsequent interviews, however, Kissinger, James Schlesinger and William Quandt, stated that the ongoing Soviet re-supply effort and Sadat's early rejection of a ceasefire were the primary motivations, not fears of Israeli use of nuclear weapons.

### Operation

Initially, only El Al provided transport, and supplies began to arrive in Israel on 10 October, the same day the first Soviet resupply by air arrived in Damascus. Nonetheless, it was soon clear that El Al's limited supply of ill-configured passenger aircraft were insufficient. Still wanting to avoid direct U.S. involvement, starting 10 October, the use of commercial carriers was explored to provide 10–20 flights a day. None of these were willing to accept the job for fear of being refused entry to Arab nations after the war. On 12 October, Nixon decided that no more delays could be allowed, and ordered the USAF to "send everything that can fly." Within nine hours, C-141s and C-5s were en route to Israel. The political maneuvering was not immediately solved by the USAF's participation, however; traditional European allies refused to allow re-supply aircraft to land for refueling or even overfly their territory. Portugal seemed willing to help though, so aircraft were dispatched to Lajes Field in the Azores Islands. After a few hours in the air, word came through that Portugal would permit them to land, and Lajes became a key staging point for the rest of the airdrop. Strategic Air Command (SAC) Boeing KC-135 Stratotankers were the first to arrive at Lajes Air Base. The KC-135s had left Pease AFB, New Hampshire, the night of Saturday, 13 October (one of the bases El Al was using to re-supply the war effort); the tankers were ferrying factory-fresh Douglas A-4 Skyhawks and F-4 Phantom II aircraft flying non-stop from the factory in St. Louis, Missouri to Ben Gurion Airport.

To comply with the demands of other European nations, even U.S. supplies already stationed in Europe were routed through Lajes and soon over thirty aircraft per day were moving through Lajes. To accommodate this, the base grew to house an extra 1,300 people who were billeted in improvised housing and hastily reactivated World War II barracks, rooms that would normally accommodate one or two enlisted men were expanded to house four (2 bunk-beds). Between the Azores and Israel, the aircraft had to follow an extremely precise route. Flying exactly along the airspace border between hostile Arab nations to the south and European nations to the north, the transport craft flew down the middle of the Mediterranean Sea to Israel. Fighter escort was deemed necessary for this leg of the journey, so American fighters from the U.S. 6th Fleet escorted the transports to within 150 miles (240 km) of Israel, where Israeli Air Force Phantoms and Mirages escorted them into Ben Gurion Airport. Along the Mediterranean route, American ships were stationed every 300 miles (480 km), and an aircraft carrier every 600 miles (970 km). These precautions appeared justified when unidentified Arab fighters made threats over the radio, but no conflict ensued. Upon arrival, the transports were unloaded by U.S. and Israeli servicemen before they returned home and supplies were expedited to the front where they arrived within a few hours. The first C-5A transport airplane arrived at Lod airport at 18:30 local time on 14 October. That same day the Battle of the Sinai had concluded in Israel's favor. A major Egyptian thrust had been stopped with the destruction of many attacking tanks, and Israel was now winning the war.

Airlifted supplies were not all that was delivered under Nickel Grass. In the opening days of the war, Arab forces destroyed significant numbers of IAF aircraft, surprising the Israelis with aggressive use of the new Soviet SA-6 Gainful SAMs. Consequently, at least 100 F-4 Phantom II fighters were sent to Israel under Nickel Grass coming from the 4th Tactical Fighter Wing, the 39th Tactical Fighter Wing and the 97th Fighter Weapons Wing. They were flown to Lod, where American pilots were swapped for their Israeli counterparts. After the replacement of USAF insignia with IAF insignia if needed, the planes were refueled and ordered to the front, often taking to the air within hours of...
having arrived. Some aircraft came directly from the USAF fleet and operated in USAF camouflage, but with Israeli insignia, thus earning the Israeli nickname "Frog". Nine days after the initial attack, Israeli launched counterattacks. Thirty-six A-4 Skyhawks from U.S. stocks, staging from Laipes were refueled by SAC KC-135A tankers from Pease Air Force Base, New Hampshire and U.S. Navy tankers from the USS John F. Kennedy west of the Straits of Gibraltar. They then flew on to the USS Franklin D. Roosevelt southeast of Sicily where they stayed overnight, then continued on to Israel refueling once more from tankers launched from the USS Independence south of Crete. Twelve C-130E Hercules transports were also transferred to Israel, the first of the type to be delivered to the IAF.

When the third cease-fire resolution was finally implemented on October 24, the airlift immediately slowed. Further flights were made to rebuild Israeli forces to their pre-war strength and Operation Nickel Grass was ended on 14 November. In the end, the military airlift shipped 22,325 tons of materiel to Israel. Additionally, the U.S. conducted its own seaborne re-supply operation, delivering 33,210 tons to Israel by 30 October. During the same general time, the Soviets airlifted 12,500–15,000 tons of supplies, more than half of which went to Syria; they also supplied another 65,000 tons mainly to Syria by means of a sealift.

**Effects**

Operation Nickel Grass had immediate and far-reaching effects. Arab members of OPEC had declared they would limit or stop oil shipments to the U.S. and other countries if they supported Israel in the conflict. Holding to their threats, the Arab states declared a complete oil embargo on the U.S. Oil prices skyrocketed, fuel became scarce and the U.S. was soon embroiled in the 1973 oil crisis.

Nickel Grass also revealed a severe deficiency in American airlift capabilities: the need for staging bases overseas. Without Portugal's assistance, the airlift might not even have been possible. As a result, the U.S. greatly expanded its aerial refueling capabilities and made long-distance flight operations the standard rather than the exception.

A GAO study of the operation discussed the shortcomings of the C-141A. As a result, the C-141B was conceived. The A models were sent back to Georgia where they were cut fore and aft of the wing, extended in length by three pallet positions, and refitted for in-flight refueling.

Nickel Grass vindicated the USAF decision to purchase the C-5 Galaxy. Since its introduction in 1970, the C-5 had been plagued by problems. The USAF claimed to have rectified the problems, but the C-5 was still viewed by the press as an expensive failure. During Nickel Grass, C-5s carried 48% of the total cargo in only 145 of the 967 total missions. The C-5 also carried "outsize" cargo such as M109 Patton tanks, M119 howitzers, ground radar systems, mobile tractor units, CH-53 Sea Stallion helicopters and A-4 Skyhawk components, cargo that could not fit in smaller aircraft. This performance justified the C-5's existence.
General George Brown, Chairman of the American Joint Chiefs of Staff, resigned after criticizing the resupply effort. According to *Time* magazine, Brown's criticisms included the opinion that the airlift was driven in part by Jews controlling the American banking system.[4][5][6]

### See also

- Israeli–United States military relations

### References


Further reading

External links


RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD

Question:

Mexican cartels are a main driver in the distribution of deadly narcotics in the United States, including fentanyl, and they are actively engaged in human trafficking, all in the pursuit of money and power. Their heinous acts have caused the deaths of thousands of Americans—both directly and indirectly. By many accounts, the cartels have effectively seized control of the Southern border, and they have used extreme violence on both sides of the border to achieve their ends. Secretary Blinken, given the use of extreme violence by groups such the Sinaloa Cartel, the Jalisco New Generation Cartel, and other similarly situated cartels to achieve their objectives and goals, can the Department of State offer a good reason not to designate these cartels as foreign terrorist organizations?

Answer:

The United States has powerful designation authorities specifically designed to combat narcotics trafficking organizations, including Executive Orders 14059 and 12978 and the Kingpin Act, and to target transnational criminal organizations, including Executive Order 13581 as amended by Executive Order 13863. We are committed to applying the full weight of our efforts and resources to debilitating the transnational criminal organizations trafficking in humans, narcotics, and weapons.
Questions for the Record Submitted to Secretary Antony Blinken by Representative Ronny Jackson #2
House Committee on Foreign Affairs
March 23, 2023

Question:

You can often tell where an organization’s priorities lie by learning where they’re committing resources. Diplomatic organizations are not exempt from this reality, and countries around the world constantly look to see where the United States is committing resources. They’re also watching to see where our competitors and adversaries are committing resources, and many developing nations are aligning themselves with whomever seems most invested. They’re also watching to see where our competitors and adversaries are committing resources, and many developing nations are aligning themselves with whomever seems most invested. The embassy imbalance between the U.S. and China is stark – 53 Chinese embassies on the continent to our 14 embassies. Secretary Blinken, given the on-going Chinese diplomatic investment in Africa, what is your department doing to convince our potential allies in this strategically vital area of the world that the U.S. is serious about its relationship with African nations and that they should turn to the U.S. and not to China?

Answer:

Through our more than 50 embassies across the African continent and our U.S. Mission to the African Union, the Department is showing our African partners why working with the United States is in their best interest. We are focused on presenting our partners options while conveying that the
United States is serious about strengthening our relationships in Africa.

Since the U.S.-African Leaders Summit last year, the Vice President, other Cabinet-level officials, and I have traveled to the region to reiterate our message about building enduring partnerships.
Questions for the Record Submitted to
Secretary Antony Blinken by
Representative Ronny Jackson #3
House Committee on Foreign Affairs
March 23, 2023

Question:

After years of hostile and frayed relations, Iran and Saudi Arabia have agreed to reestablish diplomatic ties and reopen mutual embassies. Aside from the potential repercussions of the agreement itself, one of the most worrisome aspects of this new development is that the deal was brokered by China. The United States has worked to bring order in the Middle East for decades, and China’s entrance onto the scene makes it clear that China is seeking to supplant U.S. influence in every and any way possible. Secretary Blinken, how is it possible that we’re allowing the Chinese to become the new power brokers in the Middle East, and frankly in other parts of the world, and what is your State Department doing to ensure that something like this does not happen again?

Answer:

The United States will remain actively engaged in the Middle East as the region’s leading diplomatic and defense partner. Our approach is to clearly demonstrate the benefits of a long-term partnership with the United States. Our diplomacy has de-escalated regional conflicts and strengthened regional integration. We have furthered Israel’s regional integration, using the Negev Forum to deliver tangible benefits of cooperation. We have brought Gulf partners closer together expanding defense cooperation to constrain and deter further acts of Iranian aggression.
Questions for the Record Submitted to Secretary Antony Blinken by Representative Ronny Jackson #4
House Committee on Foreign Affairs
March 23, 2023

Question:

After Xi Jinping’s recent state visit to Russia, it is clear that both Xi and Putin are aligning their respective nations in an attempt to create a new world order. Sharyl Cross, Director of the Kozmetsky Center at St. Edward’s University in Austin, Texas and a scholar of Sino-Russian relations, put it this way: “Xi Jinping seeks to assume a leading diplomatic role on the world stage and has been increasingly willing to join Moscow in challenging Western values and perspectives on international concerns.” I firmly believe that any demonstration of weakness or lack of leadership by the United States only emboldens the PRC and Russian Federation to continue this type of rhetoric and to continue to subvert U.S.-led efforts across the world. Secretary Blinken, what concrete steps do you believe the State Department can take to project strength, instill confidence that the U.S. is still a leader on the world stage, and counter moves such as this from Beijing and Moscow?

Answer:

As the President said in his State of the Union: "If the PRC threatens our sovereignty, we will act to protect our country.” The United States will continue to take actions to protect its national security, interests, and values. The President also warned PRC President Xi Jinping that there would be serious consequences in our own relationship were the PRC to provide
material assistance to Russia in its war against Ukraine or support systematic sanctions evasion. We have already sanctioned PRC entities, including PRC firm Spacety, for assisting Russia’s war effort.
Questions for the Record Submitted to Secretary Antony Blinken by Representative Richard McCormick #1
House Committee on Foreign Affairs
March 23, 2023

Question:

Does the State Department track what these funds are being used for by these migrant assistance organizations? YES or NO?

Answer:

Yes. PRM supports efforts to protect and assist refugees and vulnerable migrants and assists refugees and other displaced people as close to their home countries as possible. We work with the United Nations, other international organizations, and nongovernmental organizations, that operate these programs. The bureau manages the contributions to these organizations and monitors the programs we fund. We ensure they are working properly and that they are in line with U.S. government policies.
Questions for the Record Submitted to
Secretary Antony Blinken by
Representative Rich McCormick #2
House Committee on Foreign Affairs
March 23, 2023

Question:
I want to change gears since you are here. I would be remiss if I didn’t speak on Afghanistan. As a 20-year veteran with tours in Afghanistan and throughout the Middle East, it’s a deeply personal issue for me. What happened during the withdrawal from Afghanistan was a disaster, and it happened under your and President Biden’s watch. Former Defense Secretary Robert Gates probably said it best. He noted that President Biden “has been wrong on nearly every major foreign policy and national security issue over the past four decades.” That was before Biden even became President. Did anyone, perhaps even yourself, tell the President his plan was a terrible idea?

Answer:

President Biden announced on April 14, 2021, after consulting closely with our military, intelligence, diplomatic, and development personnel, Congress, our allies and partners, and Afghan leaders, that it was time to end America’s longest war and for American troops to come home. President Biden is the third American president in succession to express a clear interest in bringing American forces home from Afghanistan. The President refused to send another generation of Americans to fight a war
that should have ended long ago. As the White House report on the U.S. Withdrawal from Afghanistan explains, after twenty years, the United States had accomplished its mission in Afghanistan: to remove from the battlefield the terrorists who attacked the United States on 9/11, including Osama bin Laden, and degrade the terrorist threat to the United States. Two decades after the war had started, the United States had become bogged down in a war in Afghanistan with unclear objectives and no end in sight and was underinvesting in today’s and tomorrow’s national security challenges.
Questions for the Record Submitted to Secretary Antony Blinken by Representative Rich McCormick #3
House Committee on Foreign Affairs
March 23, 2023

Question:

Has anyone at the State Department been held accountable for the complete debacle that occurred under the State Department’s watch with the provisioning of SIVs and asylum claims?

Answer:

At the President’s direction, we have undertaken substantial efforts to improve the Afghan Special Immigrant Visa (SIV) program, as required by the Afghan Allies Protection Act, to streamline the application and adjudication processes, while safeguarding our national security. We surged resources and significantly increased the number of staff dedicated to this vital program. We have reviewed every stage of the multiple-step application and continue to look for areas to improve, consistent with U.S. law. I defer to the Department of Homeland Security on asylum claims.
Questions for the Record Submitted to
Secretary Antony Blinken by
Representative Rich McCormick #4
House Committee on Foreign Affairs
March 23, 2023

Question:

We left our Afghan Allies and their families. We abandoned them. Some of them are still there. Don’t forget that, and someone needs to be held accountable. Confidence among our allies in the region is waning. China is using our failure to flex its diplomatic muscles and broker deals between regional powers. China is even working with the Taliban in Afghanistan to extract critical minerals we spent years and millions of dollars developing. US foreign policy has been absent in the past two years. What steps is the State Department taking to counter China’s rising influence in the Middle East after the MASSIVE failure that is the Biden Administration’s withdrawal from Afghanistan?

Answer:

We are leading with diplomacy across our extensive security relationships to demonstrate the benefits of a long-term partnership with the United States. We continue unmatched training, consulting, logistical support, weapons sales, and intelligence sharing with regional partners. We are expanding coordination with Gulf Cooperation Council partners to expand defense cooperation and build a sustainable regional security architecture. We have also established the Negev Forum, which builds off
the Abraham Accords and further fosters regional integration and
normalization with Israel.
Questions for the Record Submitted to
Secretary Antony Blinken by
Representative Brad Sherman #1
House Committee on Foreign Affairs
March 23, 2023

Question:

While the leaders of the State Department are focused on the issues about which historians will write, one of the most basic functions of your Department is the issuance of visas. If the United States did a better job of issuing visas in a timely manner, that would do more for our public image than many of your other initiatives. The family members of American citizens and lawful permanent residents have to wait multiple years to receive an immigrant visa. Congress has passed legislation stating that “it shall be the policy of the Department [of State] to process each visa application from an alien classified as an immediate relative... within 30 days of the receipt of all necessary documents.” (Foreign Relations Act for Fiscal year 2003, PL 107-228, Division A, Title II, Subtitle C, Section 233) If other countries forced husbands and wives, or parents and children, to be separated for over three years, the United States would cite that in the Human Rights Report. In which jurisdictions is the State Department meeting the 30-day requirement outlined in Foreign Relations Act for Fiscal year 2003, PL 107-228, Division A, Title II, Subtitle C, Section 233?

Answer:

Backlogs for scheduling immigrant visa (IV) interviews at some posts resulted from reduced consular staffing during the pandemic. Our National Visa Center schedules IV interviews at most posts within 30 days (immediate relatives) or 60 days (preference) of the case being confirmed to be
documentarily complete and interview-ready. Just 12 of our 134 IV posts account for nearly 90 percent of the scheduling backlog; they continue to reduce these backlogs as staffing levels recover. The Department reduced the scheduling backlog of interview-ready applicants by nearly 25 percent since July 2021.
Questions for the Record Submitted to
Secretary Antony Blinken by
Representative Brad Sherman #2
House Committee on Foreign Affairs
March 23, 2023

Question:

What legislation could help speed up the processing of visa applications, particularly in cases that involve family members of U.S. citizens and legal permanent residents?

Answer:

The continued expanded expenditure authorities requested in the FY 2024 budget would be helpful for all consular operations. The global backlog of cases awaiting scheduling at the National Visa Center has been reduced by 27 percent from its July 2021 peak, and backlogs have been eliminated entirely in most countries. Backlogs at many posts will continue to decline as the Department fills positions by the end of FY 2023. We have implemented regulatory, policy, procedural, and technical improvements to enhance efficiency. We are prepared to brief your office at your request.
UNCLASSIFIED

Questions for the Record Submitted to
Secretary Antony Blinken by
Representative Brad Sherman #3
House Committee on Foreign Affairs
March 23, 2023

Question:

Please explain the disparities between countries in wait times for interviews and processing times for visas. How long does it take for visa interviews to be granted to those who have submitted all their documentation for an immigrant visa for immediate family members of a U.S. citizen?

Answer:

Backlogs for immigrant visas (IV) at some posts are the result of consular staffing reductions driven by pandemic-related budget constraints. The Department aims to fill all remaining vacant overseas adjudicator positions by the end of FY 2023. Our National Visa Center schedules IV immediate relative interviews at most posts within 30 days of document completion. Twelve of the 134 IV posts account for nearly 90 percent of the global scheduling backlog. Immediate relative scheduling backlogs vary at these posts, but most should decline as staffing levels rise and posts work through backlogs.
Questions for the Record Submitted to
Secretary Antony Blinken by
Representative Brad Sherman #4
House Committee on Foreign Affairs
March 23, 2023

Question:

What is the average wait time for spouses and fiancées of U.S. citizens, particularly those applying from India and Pakistan?

Answer:

Average immigrant visa scheduling wait times for spouses and fiancé(e)s differ. After receiving an approved spouse petition from USCIS and reviewing required documents from the applicant, our National Visa Center schedules an interview appointment. The National Visa Center is currently scheduling cases that were ready for interview in October 2022 for India and April 2021 for Pakistan. The National Visa Center forwards fiancé(e) cases directly to consular sections abroad, which provide applicants local scheduling and application instructions.
Questions for the Record Submitted to Secretary Antony Blinken by Representative Brad Sherman #5
House Committee on Foreign Affairs
March 23, 2023

Question:

Can the State Department send more staff to embassies and consulates with longer wait times to reduce the backlog?

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.
Questions for the Record Submitted to
Secretary Antony Blinken by
Representative Brad Sherman #6
House Committee on Foreign Affairs
March 23, 2023

Question:

Can you allow U.S. citizen family members seeking immigrant visas to apply not only in their home country, but in other countries that may have more staff availability?

Answer:

The applicant may request a transfer to where they are physically present and expect to remain legally for the duration of the process, however, under Department regulations, immigrant visa applicants must generally apply in their country of residence. A consular officer stationed there can best assess visa eligibility as they are familiar with the culture, language, local documents, fraud trends, and legal and political framework. Applicants may sometimes apply in another country either categorically or on a case-by-case basis.
Questions for the Record Submitted to Secretary Antony Blinken by Representative Dina Titus #1
House Committee on Foreign Affairs
March 23, 2023

Question:

The FY22 NDAA included language to establish the Office of International Disability Rights within the State Department. Yet that office has still not been created nor does the FY24 budget request money for one. Candidly, what is the hold up here? What is the precise timeline for establishing this office, as required by law? And what additional resources, if any, do you need from Congress to do so?

Answer:

In November 2021, President Biden appointed Sara Minkara as the Special Advisor on International Disability Rights (SAIDR). In her role, Special Advisor Minkara leads the U.S. Department of State’s comprehensive strategy to promote and protect the rights of persons with disabilities internationally – a role critical to ensuring that U.S. diplomacy and foreign assistance promote and protect the human rights of persons with disabilities around the world. FY 2023 resources have been identified to support Special Advisor Minkara’s team, which consists of four permanent staff.
members, and operates with a current budget of $750,000 to support travel and contract staff.
Questions for the Record Submitted to
Secretary Antony Blinken by
Representative Dina Titus #2
House Committee on Foreign Affairs
March 23, 2023

Question:

I and many others are looking on with great concern at what’s happening in Pakistan. What are we doing to ensure stability and political civility in this critical, nuclear-armed ally?

Answer:

The United States continues to support peaceful upholding of democratic, constitutional, and legal principles in line with Pakistan’s constitution. Our embassy and consulates engage with a wide range of interlocutors to include the government, opposition parties, civil society and NGOs, media, businesses, and others to convey our support for peace and adherence to democratic processes and economic stability. We have strongly encouraged Pakistan to continue with the required reforms for another tranche of its IMF program. We have also had a series of talks with Pakistan on counterterrorism and security.
Questions for the Record Submitted to
Secretary Antony Blinken by
Representative Dina Titus #3
House Committee on Foreign Affairs
March 23, 2023

Question:

What are we doing to ensure elections move forward, as called for in their constitution?

Answer:

With federal elections due in the fall, the United States has regularly conveyed its support for adherence to Pakistan’s constitution and law. We remain engaged with NGOs, election observer groups, civil society, opposition and incumbent parties to ensure elections move forward in accordance with Pakistani law.
Questions for the Record Submitted to Secretary Antony Blinken by Representative Dina Titus #4 House Committee on Foreign Affairs March 23, 2023

Question:

And what are we doing and communicating to ensure that opposition voices aren’t silenced?

Answer:

As we have done in the past, and as is a standard part of our bilateral relationships the world over, U.S. officials continue to meet with a wide range of interlocutors including opposition voices, NGOs, minority groups, and other underrepresented voices. It is critical for all governments, including in Pakistan, to ensure opposition voices are not silenced. We maintain open channels of communication with a diverse set of opposition figures to ensure their voices are heard. We also regularly engage with the government on the need to allow political space for the opposition.
Questions for the Record Submitted to
Secretary Antony Blinken by
Representative Dina Titus #5
House Committee on Foreign Affairs
March 23, 2023

Question:

I was pleased to see Ambassador Geoff Pyatt sworn in as Assistant Secretary for Energy Resources last fall. Does appointing a former Ambassador to both Ukraine and Greece to this post signal our continued commitment to assisting our European allies find non-Russia supplied gas and gas routes?

Answer:

Strengthening energy security in Europe is a critical priority for the United States, and Assistant Secretary Pyatt is uniquely qualified to lead these efforts. Putin’s war of choice and weaponization of energy resources have underscored the need to diversify supplies and accelerate the energy transition. The United States is working with allies and partners to diversify Europe’s natural gas imports in the short-term while also enhancing energy efficiency and reducing overall demand for fossil fuels in line with our shared climate and clean energy goals.
Questions for the Record Submitted to
Secretary Antony Blinken by
Representative Dina Titus #6
House Committee on Foreign Affairs
March 23, 2023

Question:

What has the impact of the Gas Interconnector Greece-Bulgaria coming online been for providing alternative routes for gas into Europe?

Answer:

The opening of the Interconnector Greece-Bulgaria (IGB) allowed for reliable sources of natural gas to reach areas of Europe that were previously totally dependent on Russia. The IGB supports imports of gas from Azerbaijan through the Trans Adriatic Pipeline and re-gasified liquefied natural gas (LNG) supplied through import terminals in Greece. The IGB, once fully utilized, will supply up to five billion cubic meters (bcm) of gas to Bulgaria, southeast Europe, and the Balkans.
Question:

What percent of its capacity is the Interconnector running at?

Answer:

From October to December 2022, the Interconnector Greece Bulgaria transported about 0.5 billion cubic meters (bcm) of natural gas using about 67 percent of pipeline capacity, although it trended closer to 100 percent of capacity in December 2022.
Questions for the Record Submitted to
Secretary Antony Blinken by
Representative Dina Titus #8
House Committee on Foreign Affairs
March 23, 2023

Question:
And if not near capacity, what more needs to occur to increase output?

Answer:
Once the Trans Adriatic Pipeline expands its capacity from roughly 10 to 11 billion cubic meters (bcm) per year and the Alexandroupoli floating storage regasification unit (FSRU) comes online at the end of 2023, sufficient export supply will exist to ensure the Interconnector Greece Bulgaria (IGB) continuously operates near full capacity. IGB owners are already working on expanding the pipeline’s capacity from three to five bcm by early 2025.
Question:

Are there additional pipelines or other infrastructure projects in the works that would continue to ensure the energy stability of Europe without allowing the Putin regime to profit, and how is the U.S. government supporting those initiatives?

Answer:

European states are advancing several energy security infrastructure projects, including hydrogen pipelines like the planned H2Med pipeline, new liquefied natural gas (LNG) import terminals across the continent, and a variety of clean and renewable energy projects. The United States is working closely with allies and partners to promote and advance near-, medium-, and long-term projects that diversify energy supplies and promote energy security across all of Europe, including through the U.S.-EU Task Force on Energy Security.
Questions for the Record Submitted to
Secretary Antony Blinken by
Representative Dina Titus #10
House Committee on Foreign Affairs
March 23, 2023

Question:

The FY24 budget proposal lacks dedicated funding for Transnational Racially and Ethnically Motivated Violent Extremism (RMVEs). What is the administration's strategy to combat RMVEs?

Answer:

The State Department plays a leading role in the Administration's efforts to address the transnational dimension of the Racially or Ethnically Motivated Violent Extremism (REMVE) threat. Building our partners’ capabilities to address the REMVE threat – using our foreign assistance funding – is a key element of our overall effort. In addition, we use diplomatic and multilateral engagement and public diplomacy to bolster international cooperation and information sharing, and we employ our counterterrorism designation authorities to address REMVE financing.
Questions for the Record Submitted to Secretary Antony Blinken by Representative Dina Titus #11 House Committee on Foreign Affairs March 23, 2023

Question:
Are we dedicating enough resources to this urgent threat absent a request in the President’s budget?

Answer:
Countering the transnational dimensions of Racially or Ethnically Motivated Violent Extremism (REMMVE) is a State Department and Administration priority. Our deep experience in addressing transnational terrorism threats, such as those posed by al Qa’ida and ISIS, has been valuable in advancing the State Department’s efforts to counter the international REMVME threat. We are effectively using our existing counterterrorism resources and tools to counter REMVME, including diplomacy, foreign assistance, sanctions, and information-sharing.
Questions for the Record Submitted to
Secretary Antony Blinken by
Representative Dina Titus #12
House Committee on Foreign Affairs
March 23, 2023

Question:

What steps is State taking to address the concerns listed in the ODNI’s Annual Threat Assessment related to RMVEs and ensuring the safety of Americans abroad?

Answer:

The State Department is at the forefront of the Administration’s efforts to bolster global information sharing, multilateral engagement, and cooperation on Racially or Ethnically Motivated Violent Extremism (REMVE). We use a broad range of tools to counter the transnational REMVE threat, including public diplomacy, information sharing, and building partner capacity. We also regularly conduct outreach with key foreign partners to discuss the REMVE threat in their respective countries to help guide broader U.S. policy efforts related to countering transnational REMVE.
Questions for the Record Submitted to
Secretary Antony Blinken by
Representative Michael Waltz #1
House Committee on Foreign Affairs
March 23, 2023

Question:

The United States is the largest donor of humanitarian aid to Afghanistan, providing $2 billion since August 2021. Further, the U.S. is the single largest donor to the United Nations’ 2022 Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP) for Afghanistan, contributing over $1.1 billion, or 34.3%, of the HRP’s total funding. In June 2022, UN official Martin Griffiths acknowledged that aid diversion by the Taliban is a grave concern and, in January 2023, SIGAR reported that “neither the State Department nor SIGAR have visibility on how much revenue the Taliban-controlled ministries may be collecting from fees and other payments from UN agencies or NGOs.” How is the U.S. monitoring to ensure U.S. taxpayer-funded humanitarian aid is delivered in line with humanitarian principles to those in need rather than falling into the hands of terrorist groups, like the Haqqanis, as a means of propping up the Taliban?

Answer:

We take seriously our duty as a steward of American taxpayer money and hold our implementing partners to the highest standards to ensure that these funds are used wisely, effectively, and for their intended purpose. We require our partners to have proper safeguards and risk mitigation measures in place to ensure that humanitarian aid reaches those who need it. For instance, all U.S. government humanitarian implementers must comply with
robust financial and programmatic monitoring, reporting, and compliance mechanisms. Through robust monitoring and evaluation and regular consultations with our partners, we can quickly identify attempted diversion and suspend or terminate programs if necessary.
Questions for the Record Submitted to
Secretary Antony Blinken by
Representative Michael Waltz #2
House Committee on Foreign Affairs
March 23, 2023

Question:

As you know, SIGAR has reported that the State Department and other executive branch agencies refused to comply with SIGAR oversight requests on numerous occasions by questioning SIGAR’s authority and claiming requested information is “too sensitive to share” with SIGAR. Will you and your Department commit to complying with all ongoing and future SIGAR inquiries on humanitarian aid for Afghanistan?

Answer:

The Department remains committed to helping oversight bodies fulfill their important statutory mandates. We respect the role of these organizations and continue to cooperate with various Inspectors General, including SIGAR, to ensure transparency and accountability in the use of taxpayer funds. The Department continues to cooperate with SIGAR by responding to all appropriate information requests. We continue to seek SIGAR’s cooperation in addressing how sensitive information will be used and protected.
Questions for the Record Submitted to
Secretary Antony Blinken by
Representative Michael Waltz #3
House Committee on Foreign Affairs
March 23, 2023

Question:

Yes or no, are you aware of U.S. or UN funded humanitarian aid ending up in the hands of members of the Haqqani Network?

Answer:

No, we are not aware of humanitarian aid falling into the hands of members of the Haqqani network. We require our partners to have proper safeguards and risk mitigation in place to ensure that humanitarian aid reaches those who need it. For instance, all U.S. government humanitarian implementers must comply with robust financial and programmatic monitoring, reporting, and compliance mechanisms. Through robust monitoring and evaluation and regular consultations with our partners, we can quickly identify attempted diversion and suspend or terminate programs if necessary.
Questions for the Record Submitted to Secretary Antony Blinken by Representative Michael Waltz #4 House Committee on Foreign Affairs March 23, 2023

Question:

Chairman McCaul has rightly highlighted that State is stonewalling and not complying with this committee’s requests for documents and interviews regarding the Afghanistan withdrawal. President Biden called the withdrawal an extraordinary success. If this operation was such a success, why are you so reluctant to turn over documents or have State discuss it with this committee?

Answer:

I am committed to working closely with the Committee to further its understanding of the withdrawal of U.S. forces from, and the current situation in, Afghanistan. The Department has provided over 200 briefings to bipartisan Members and staff covering a wide range of topics, including the noncombatant evacuation operation, relocation efforts, the rights of women and girls, counterterrorism, and our efforts to hold the Taliban accountable, as well as over 3,500 pages of responsive documents. We will continue to be transparent and cooperative on these and other issues related to Afghanistan, and I look forward to continuing to work with the Committee on this matter.
Questions for the Record Submitted to
Secretary Antony Blinken by
Representative Michael Waltz #5
House Committee on Foreign Affairs
March 23, 2023

Question:

In your testimony you stated, “Our unmatched network of alliances and partnerships has never been stronger.” However, the disastrous U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan opened new pathways for the Chinese Communist Party to exert their political influence globally and left many of our partner nations questioning our commitments – especially Taiwan. How does the Administration plan to utilize Political-Military Bureau funding to intensify “focus on Taiwan security policy” as specified in your budget?

Answer:

The Department is taking a range of actions across military, diplomatic, and economic realms to reassure our partners, including Taiwan, that we are committed to fostering a free, open, secure, and prosperous world. We are reviewing all available authorities and resources to consider short and long-term opportunities to bolster support for Taiwan and other critical partners in the region. For example, the FY 2024 budget includes a foreign military financing request of $113 million to address emerging priorities globally, which could include Taiwan.
Questions for the Record Submitted to
Secretary Antony Blinken by
Representative Michael Waltz #6
House Committee on Foreign Affairs
March 23, 2023

Question:

As the United States works to confront Iran’s malign behavior and exploitation of Iraq’s political, legal, and military institutions, the U.S. must include focus on the Kurdistan Region. Despite being one of our most reliable partners, the Kurdistan Region continues to bear the costs of Iran’s control in Iraq. How will the Administration ensure Congressionally appropriated security assistance proposed for the Kurdistan Region does not get blocked by the regime in Baghdad?

Answer:

The Department works closely with our partners in Iraq to ensure that the security assistance we provide is applied as programmed and as needed. The Government of Iraq has cooperated in the approval process for U.S. security assistance to the Kurdish Peshmerga consistently, and that includes the current government. We continually monitor our security assistance to Iraq and will revisit the approval process should the need arise.
Questions for the Record Submitted to 
Secretary Antony Blinken by 
Representative Michael Waltz #7 
House Committee on Foreign Affairs 
March 23, 2023

Question:

Similarly, how will the Administration ensure security assistance proposed for Iraqi Security Forces do not go to Iran-backed militias that are now being trained by the Iraqi Ministry of Defense?

Answer:

The Department provides security assistance consistent with all applicable legal and policy requirements. This includes measures such as Leahy vetting and counterterrorism namecheck vetting, to ensure the intended beneficiary is the recipient.
Questions for the Record Submitted to
Secretary Antony Blinken by
Representative Michael Waltz #8
House Committee on Foreign Affairs
March 23, 2023

Question:

Do you believe the Mexican drug cartels are a clear and present threat to Americans and the American homeland?

Answer:

Fentanyl along with the illegal activity surrounding its production and distribution in the U.S. by drug trafficking organizations pose a significant threat to the United States. The Department remains committed to continuing to apply the full weight of our efforts and resources, to include diplomatic engagement, foreign assistance, and sanctions, towards countering these organizations and their illegal activities.
Questions for the Record Submitted to
Secretary Antony Blinken by
Representative Michael Waltz #9
House Committee on Foreign Affairs
March 23, 2023

Question:

Do you believe the Mexican drug cartels pose destabilizing threat to Mexico and other countries in the region?

Answer:

Transnational criminal organizations (TCOs) remain the greatest drug trafficking threat to the United States and the region, responsible for the trafficking of heroin, cocaine, and synthetic drugs, including fentanyl. Mexican TCOs work with other criminal organizations throughout the region. The Department supports Mexican, Western Hemisphere, and global partners in fighting transnational organized crime and continues to build a coalition to address the security and health threat of synthetic drugs by countering the manufacturing and trafficking of drugs abroad.
Questions for the Record Submitted to
Secretary Antony Blinken by
Representative Michael Waltz #10
House Committee on Foreign Affairs
March 23, 2023

Question:

On February 10, President Biden welcomed Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula de Silva to the White House. Shortly thereafter, upon his return to Brazil, President Lula welcomed 2 Iranian warships to dock at Rio De Janiero, the IRIS Makran and IRIS Dena. These ships have been targeted by Treasury’s Office of Foreign Assets Control for sanctions. Earlier this month, you met with your Brazilian counterpart, Foreign Minister Mauro Vieir. Did you raise concerns about these Iranian warships docking in his country?

Answer:

In private conversations and public comments before and after the Iranian vessels docked in Brazil, we made our position clear to countries in the region that these two ships have no business making port calls anywhere. We designated both the Dena and the Makran in February, pursuant to E.O. 13599. Brazil is a sovereign country that will make its own decisions about engaging with Iran. Hosting naval vessels belonging to a regime that is brutally oppressing its own people, providing weapons to Russia for use against Ukraine, and engaging in terrorism and destabilizing activities sends the wrong message and is the wrong decision, in our view.
Questions for the Record Submitted to
Secretary Antony Blinken by
Representative Michael Waltz #11
House Committee on Foreign Affairs
March 23, 2023

Question:

From news sources, it appears that these ships will next sail through the Panama Canal. If accurate, this would be the first time warships from the Islamic Republic of Iran have ever crossed the canal. I am concerned that this passage may spur more activity, allowing Iran to smuggle its oil and gas through the canal, enabling Iran, a designated State Sponsor of Terrorism, to evade sanctions. Can you tell this committee, and the American people, how the Department plans to address this circumvention of sanctions?

Answer:

I share your concerns about troubling actions by the Islamic Republic of Iran. We understand that the ships have not transited the Panama Canal. Based on current information, we do not expect them to do so. The Panama Canal Authority is obligated to follow international treaties that ensure neutrality of the canal. The Department works with the Panama Canal Authority and the Panama Maritime Authority to maintain awareness of ship traffic through the canal and consistently share information on ships attempting to evade sanctions.
Questions for the Record Submitted to Secretary Antony Blinken by Representative Michael Waltz #12 House Committee on Foreign Affairs March 23, 2023

Question:

In the entirety of the 231 pages FY 2024 Congressional Budget Justification for the Department of State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs written by your Department, the Uyghur people are only mentioned once — under the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP). Specifically, the document states that it will use funds within the USRAP program to give “priority access for at-risk Uyghurs.” However, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) have over one million Uyghurs and other ethnic minorities wrongfully detained in camps in Xinjiang. Reports and documentation have confirmed that these detained individuals are subject to forced labor, forced sterilization, and other human rights abuses at the hands of the CCP. How does the Administration plan to use funds in this budget to ensure the release of wrongfully detained Uyghurs and ethnic minorities in Xinjiang, in addition to supporting asylum for at-risk Uyghurs?

Answer:

The United States remains focused on the protection of Uyghurs and members of other ethnic and religious minority groups fleeing genocide and crimes against humanity committed by the People’s Republic of China (PRC) in Xinjiang. The Department continues to press for release of those unjustly detained and monitors PRC threats, including transnational repression.
The Department strongly advocates to prevent refoulement of Uyghurs in countries where they have sought protection and continues efforts to enhance and expand USRAP access for Uyghurs outside of the PRC.
Questions for the Record Submitted to Secretary Antony Blinken by
Representative Michael Waltz #13
House Committee on Foreign Affairs
March 23, 2023

Question:

How will you personally work to ensure that wrongfully detained Uyghurs with U.S. citizen relatives, like Dr. Gulshan Abbas, are released and reunited with their families? Can you commit to personally raising Dr. Abbas' case, and those like hers, in any future meetings with Foreign Minister Qin or other CCP leaders?

Answer:

We continue to call for the immediate and unconditional release of PRC nationals who are unjustly detained or subject to coercive exit bans. The Department raises priority cases of concern with the PRC government at the highest levels, including advocating for the humanitarian release of Dr. Gulshan Abbas.
Questions for the Record Submitted to
Secretary Antony Blinken by
Representative Collin Allred #1
House Committee on Foreign Affairs
March 23, 2023

Question:

Mr. Secretary, as a Member of Congress, I’ve had the opportunity to travel around the world and meet with our partners overseas. From my experience, I can tell that there is fatigue with China’s actions in the Global South. Predatory loans, undermining of democratic institutions through corruption, and their overall approach to these countries are central themes that I’ve heard over and over again. But I see a real opportunity here that we have the ability to act on now. I was heartened to see you visit Africa earlier this month as part of a series of high-level diplomatic visits to the continent following commitments made at the U.S. - Africa Leaders Summit. Mr. Secretary, please describe how the proposed cuts to your budget would impact your agency’s ability to counter China’s predatory actions, most notably in sub-Saharan Africa and the Western Hemisphere?

Answer:

If the Department’s and USAID’s FY 2024 budget is straight-lined with the FY 2022 base level of $53.4 billion, excluding supplemental funding, it would call into question the United States’ foreign policy, national security and development leadership and jeopardize U.S. national security. Reductions to FY 2022 levels would significantly scale back our efforts to counter aggressive and coercive tactics of the PRC, including in Africa and
Western Hemisphere. We would also have to reduce efforts to deter PRC aggression and coercion, including through the Countering PRC Influence Fund that supports ongoing efforts to outcompete with the PRC.
Questions for the Record Submitted to
Secretary Antony Blinken by
Representative Collin Allred #2
House Committee on Foreign Affairs
March 23, 2023

Question:

Where do you see opportunities for America on the African continent?

Answer:

The Biden-Harris Administration seeks to promote U.S. interests in partnership with Africans in sectors critical to Africa’s economic growth, like agribusiness, clean energy, digital, transportation, and healthcare. We will reinforce efforts to increase economic development through greater trade on the continent through support for the Africa Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), as well as increased utilization of the Africa Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) trade preference program.
Questions for the Record Submitted to Secretary Antony Blinken by Representative Collin Allred #3 House Committee on Foreign Affairs March 23, 2023

Question:
And what is your plan for leveraging American strengths in the region, especially through our country’s commercial influence?

Answer:
I will advance private sector interests by using the convening power our embassy officials have to increase the amount and quality of commercial assistance and advocacy provided on behalf of U.S. companies. My team will seek to strengthen business-enabling environments in African nations while reducing the real risks as well as misperceptions of risk in doing business in Africa. We will highlight to our African partners the benefits of working with U.S. firms who adhere to the highest labor, environmental and governance standards while providing quality products and services.
Questions for the Record Submitted to
Secretary Antony Blinken by
Representative Collin Allred #4
House Committee on Foreign Affairs
March 23, 2023

Question:

The Biden-Harris Administration has been pursuing its “root causes strategy” to find permanent and sustainable solutions to the causes of immigration from Central America. This includes supporting democratic processes, improving economic opportunities, combating criminal gangs and corruption, as well as promoting human rights. I believe that this strategy is critical to dealing with the issues at our southern border. Much more so than building a wall. Should your department lose funding, how will that impact your ability to execute this strategy and engage with our partners in the region?

Answer:

Addressing the root causes of irregular migration to the U.S. border from Central America requires sustained commitment across a range of stakeholders, leveraging assistance with private sector investment to improve lives and create hope in the region. Reduced funding would affect key lines of effort to dissuade irregular migration, such as improving Central American conditions for health care, education programs, support for small businesses, and the training of civilian police. It would also reverse
long-term efforts to promote the rule of law and human rights in a region where authoritarian influence is threatening democratic practices.
Questions for the Record Submitted to Secretary Antony Blinken by Representative Collin Allred #5
House Committee on Foreign Affairs
March 23, 2023

Question:

Who do you see as our strongest partners here, and what collaboration or coordination is needed?

Answer:

The Department and our interagency colleagues implement the Root Causes Strategy with diverse partners, including governments, the private sector, and international and local actors. As foreign governments must meet U.S. Congressionally mandated criteria (e.g., the rule of law, good governance, and human rights) to receive assistance, we must also work with likeminded partners, including civil society, where official channels fall short of shared values. Sustained programming and diplomatic engagement are key to advance U.S. efforts to stem irregular migration from the region.
Questions for the Record Submitted to
Secretary Antony Blinken by
Representative Collin Allred #6
House Committee on Foreign Affairs
March 23, 2023

Question:

Secretary Blinken, in the State Department’s Congressional Budget
Justification, it is underlined that the agency is requesting funding for
staffing and recruitment with an emphasis on State’s Bureau of Consular
Affairs. In our last hearing with NGO and veteran witnesses who played
pivotal roles in processing Afghan SIV applications after the fall of Kabul,
they expressed ongoing systemic problems with the agency’s handling of
visa applications that stem across Administrations, both Democrat and
Republican. These ongoing problems include long visa wait time, delays,
and disjointed communication with local partners on the ground. How has
the Department worked to address the numerous deficiencies and delays
within the Bureau?

Answer:

At the President’s direction, we have undertaken substantial efforts to
improve the Afghan Special Immigrant Visa program to streamline the
application and adjudication processes, while safeguarding our national
security. We surged resources and significantly increased the number of
staff dedicated to this vital program. We have reviewed every stage of the
multiple step application process to streamline it wherever possible, consistent with U.S. law, and continue to look for areas to improve.
Questions for the Record Submitted to Secretary Antony Blinken by Representative Collin Allred #7
House Committee on Foreign Affairs
March 23, 2023

Question:

How will the FY24 request for personnel funding help alleviate some of these agency pitfalls?

Answer:

The FY 2024 request includes an additional $98.1 million increase over the FY 2023 adjusted enacted of $774 million, primarily to fill vacancies and onboard new Foreign Service and Civil Service employees. These increases will give the Bureau of Consular Affairs the vital personnel resources it needs to address the challenges caused by the unprecedented demand for consular services.
Questions for the Record Submitted to
Secretary Antony Blinken by
Representative Collin Allred #8
House Committee on Foreign Affairs
March 23, 2023

Question 8:

Secretary Blinken, you and President Biden have stressed that the JCPOA is not on the Administration’s agenda, and it is hard to envision any near-term path to a diplomatic agreement to resolve concerns over Iran’s nuclear program. Yet, Iran’s nuclear program is not at a standstill and is making dangerous advancements, including the IAEA’s most recent announcement that Iran has enriched uranium to 84% purity, more than what was used in the first U.S. nuclear weapons. In this unclassified hearing, can you update the committee on Iran’s nuclear advancements?

Answer:

Although the JCPOA has not been on the agenda for months, President Biden remains committed to ensuring that Iran cannot acquire a nuclear weapon and believes that diplomacy is the best way to achieve that goal. Iran has continued manufacturing, installing, and operating thousands of advanced centrifuges, and accumulated substantial amounts of highly enriched uranium for which it has no credible civilian use. We have made clear our concerns that Iran could now enrich enough nuclear material for a weapon in weeks or less, should it make a decision to do so.
Questions for the Record Submitted to Secretary Antony Blinken by Representative Joaquin Castro #1 
House Committee on Foreign Affairs
March 23, 2023

Question:

War Powers: In recent months, journalists and members of civil society have uncovered information about the Department of Defense’s counterterrorism and irregular warfare “surrogate force” programs under 10 U.S.C. § 127e and § 1202 of the National Defense Authorization Act for FY 2018. Legal experts have expressed concerns about whether these authorities have been or could be used to conduct hostilities that Congress has not authorized. Has the Department of State conducted an independent review of the international law and domestic war powers implications of the Department of Defense’s use of its §§ 127e and 1202 authorities?

Answer:

Both § 127e and §1202 are Department of Defense (DoD) authorities, and DoD is best placed to address questions specific to the use of these authorities, which it does in part through statutory reporting requirements. The Department of State participates in interagency processes to review the international and domestic legal bases for U.S. operations, in coordination with the relevant legal offices from DoD, the Department of Justice, and other agencies as appropriate. The Department of State has not conducted a formal independent review of DoD’s use of these authorities.
Questions for the Record Submitted to Secretary Antony Blinken by Representative Joaquin Castro #2 House Committee on Foreign Affairs March 23, 2023

Question:

If such a review has been conducted, when was it conducted and what were the results of that review?

Answer:

The Department of State has not conducted a formal independent review of the Department of Defense’s use of these authorities.
Questions for the Record Submitted to
Secretary Antony Blinken by
Representative Joaquin Castro #3
House Committee on Foreign Affairs
March 23, 2023

Question:
If such a review has been conducted, will the Department of State share that review with Congress?

Answer:
The Department of State has not conducted a formal independent review of the Department of Defense’s use of these authorities.
Questions for the Record Submitted to
Secretary Antony Blinken by
Representative Joaquin Castro #4
House Committee on Foreign Affairs
March 23, 2023

Question:

The Department of Defense reportedly exercises “operational control” or “OPCON” over its surrogate forces. To the extent that the Department of Defense directs its surrogate forces under 10 U.S.C. § 127e and § 1202 of the National Defense Authorization Act for FY 2018 to undertake kinetic action: Would this kinetic action be attributable to the United States under international law?

Answer:

The Department of Defense is best placed to address questions specific to the use of these authorities and the extent to which they exercise “operational control.” As a general matter, the customary international law of state responsibility supplies the standards for attributing acts to States. From a legal perspective, operations conducted by non-State actors are attributable to a State under the law of state responsibility when such actors engage in operations pursuant to the State’s instructions or under the State’s direction or control.
Questions for the Record Submitted to
Secretary Antony Blinken by
Representative Joaquin Castro #5
House Committee on Foreign Affairs
March 23, 2023

Question:

Would this kinetic action need to be based on an authorization for use of military force or the President’s inherent power under Article II of the Constitution?

Answer:

The Department of Defense is best placed to address questions specific to the use of these authorities and the extent to which they involve “kinetic action.” As a general matter, Article II of the Constitution and congressional authorization may provide the domestic legal basis for the use of force, depending on the particular circumstances at issue. Neither 10 U.S.C. § 127e nor § 1202 of NDAA 2018 is itself an authorization for the use of military force.
Questions for the Record Submitted to
Secretary Antony Blinken by
Representative Joaquin Castro #6
House Committee on Foreign Affairs
March 23, 2023

Question:

The 2022 National Defense Strategy says that foreign competitors are engaging in “gray zone operations at odds with international norms and below the threshold of a credible military response.” What are the standards that the Department of State would use to assess whether (a) a cyberattack, (b) an act of electronic warfare, or (c) an information operation constitutes a use of force or an armed attack?

Answer:

The United States has previously identified certain factors for assessing whether a cyber activity constitutes a use of force or an armed attack in submissions to the UN Group of Governmental Experts, indicating that factors to consider include “the nature and extent of injury or death to persons and the destruction of, or damage to, property.” These statements emphasized that this is “necessarily a case-by-case, fact-specific inquiry.” The Department would use similar factors in other contexts.
Questions for the Record Submitted to
Secretary Antony Blinken by
Representative Joaquin Castro #7
House Committee on Foreign Affairs
March 23, 2023

Question:
Consular Affairs: Currently, the operations of Consular Affairs are funded by a number of fee authorities for services provided, including fees for issuing passports and for granting visas. For most fees, authorities are granted for the State Department to collect the fee and then use the revenues from the fees for a specific purpose. For certain authorities, the State Department is not authorized to use the revenue from the fee. For which fee-based services does the State Department not have the authority to use revenue to fund State Department programs?

Answer:
Consular Affairs (CA) currently retains the Passport Application and Execution Fee (PAEF) but only has the authority to expend FY 2022 collections. CA remits fees for overseas citizens services to the Treasury, including, for example, consular report of birth abroad applications and notarial and authentication services. CA also remits to Treasury a portion of the immigrant and nonimmigrant visa (NIV) application fees, NIV issuance fees, passport file search fees, and the fee for determining returning resident status.
Questions for the Record Submitted to Secretary Antony Blinken by Representative Joaquin Castro #8
House Committee on Foreign Affairs
March 23, 2023

Question:

What proportion of all fees collected come from such services that the State Department does not have the authority to use revenue from?

Answer:

In FY 2022, Consular Affairs (CA) remitted $188.6 million to the Treasury, or 3.88 percent of all fees collected, mainly from U.S. citizen services provided overseas or immigrant visa applications. In FY 2023, a larger proportion of the Department’s collected fees, approximately $658 million, will not be available for expenditure. An estimated $206 million will be remitted to the Treasury, while $452 million made up of Passport Application and Execution Fees will be retained in State’s account for which the Department does not have spending authority.
Questions for the Record Submitted to Secretary Antony Blinken by Representative Joaquin Castro #9
House Committee on Foreign Affairs
March 23, 2023

Question:

In the next five years, how much revenue from such services will the State Department have to remit to the Treasury or be restricted from spending due to a lack of authorities?

Answer:

Annually, the Department estimates it will remit to the Treasury approximately $200 million of non-retained fees, including portions of the immigrant and nonimmigrant visa application fees as well as fees charged for various overseas citizen services. In addition, absent expenditure authority, the Department will collect and retain, but lack authority to spend, approximately $500 million in Passport Application and Execution Fees (PAEF) every year. PAEF is the only retained fee targeted to fund overseas citizen services.
Questions for the Record Submitted to
Secretary Antony Blinken by
Representative Joaquin Castro #10
House Committee on Foreign Affairs
March 23, 2023

Question:

Current law requires certain fees to typically be used for specific purposes. If the Department of State were given the authority to use collected fees for any purposes to further the Department’s consular mission – for example, by pooling all collected fees and spending them based on need – would that allow the Department of State to better provide services to Americans and to individuals who apply for visas to visit the United States?

Answer:

Expanded expenditure authority for all retained fees would address structural challenges faced by the Consular and Border Security Programs account by enabling the Department to better align collections to services. It would also help with resource alignment during periods of volatility in demand. During the pandemic, expanded expenditure authorities were an effective fiscal management tool that afforded the Department the flexibility to avoid furloughs and reductions in force, allowing us to maintain critical operations and allocate funding where it was needed most.
Questions for the Record Submitted to
Secretary Antony Blinken by
Representative Joaquin Castro #11
House Committee on Foreign Affairs
March 23, 2023

Question:

Western Hemisphere – U.S.-Mexico: Secretary Blinken, as a member of the Texas Congressional delegation, the effort of advancing trade and economic growth between Texas and Mexico is a top priority of mine. The Texas-Mexico border is an economic engine for the U.S. and Mexico. The movement of people and goods across the border has resulted in significant growth in employment, population, incomes, and education levels borderwide. Moreover, goods moved across the Texas-Mexico border support over seven million jobs across the U.S. and Mexico and contribute $343 billion annually to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of both countries. With this in mind, I request your assessment of the current Presidential Permit process. Language on the State Department website in regards to the permit process states in part, the Department believes that it is generally in the national interest to facilitate the efficient movement of legitimate goods and travelers across U.S. borders. With that in mind, Mr. Secretary, can you define for me what you believe the role of the Secretary of State is, in light of Executive Order 13867 issued on May 29, 2020, in regards to approving/disapproving Presidential Permits?

Answer:

According to Executive Order 13867, my role as Secretary of State is to receive all Presidential permit applications, request additional information the President may deem necessary, and refer the application and pertinent information to heads of agencies specified by the President. In addition, I
may solicit such advice from state, tribal, and local government officials and foreign governments, as the President may deem necessary, and advise the President as to whether an application serves the foreign policy interests of the United States. Any decision to issue, deny, or amend a permit is made solely by the President.
Questions for the Record Submitted to
Secretary Antony Blinken by
Representative Joaquin Castro #12
House Committee on Foreign Affairs
March 23, 2023

Question:

Given the current and projected travel demand, improving the capacity and operations of the existing infrastructure is critical to alleviate traffic congestion, facilitate international trade, e-commerce, reduce environmental impacts, and improve the quality of life for residents in the border region. Given the current Presidential permitting process was originally created in 1968, do you believe that it can offer applicants a fair, efficient and transparent assessment of their requests to build these desperately needed border crossings?

Answer:

Yes. The Presidential permitting process seeks to ensure that construction, operation, and maintenance of any infrastructure across a U.S. land border serves the national interest. In accordance with Executive Order 13867, issued April 10, 2019, the Department of State works closely with our U.S. government interagency partners, state, tribal, and local government stakeholders as well as foreign governments to promote cross-border infrastructure and facilitate legitimate trade and travel via U.S. land borders.
Questions for the Record Submitted to
Secretary Antony Blinken by
Representative Joaquin Castro #13
House Committee on Foreign Affairs
March 23, 2023

Question:

Haiti: The situation in Haiti is horrendous and shows no sign of improvement in the near future. What are the Department’s plans for new humanitarian aid and security assistance to Haiti in FY 2024?

Answer:

The FY 2024 request includes $291.5 million for Haiti. It will address the urgent training, equipping, and vetting needs of the Haitian National Police in its fight against gang violence. Our assistance will continue to support humanitarian and development needs and help build a more stable and economically viable Haiti. USAID’s humanitarian programs will continue to support food security and nutrition assistance; access to clean water and critical health services; and protection interventions, including to prevent and respond to gender-based violence.
Questions for the Record Submitted to Secretary Antony Blinken by Representative Joaquin Castro #14 House Committee on Foreign Affairs March 23, 2023

Question:

Does the Department plan to provide additional assistance to Haiti through the funding mechanisms established by the Global Fragility Act and, if so, how would that aid complement the other funds requested for FY2024?

Answer:

The State Department plans to request funding through the Prevention and Stabilization Fund (PSF) for FY 2024 to provide continued assistance to Haiti. As a dedicated funding mechanism supporting Global Fragility Act (GFA) implementation, PSF resources support the 10-year plans pursuant to the GFA. These plans are designed to align and integrate diplomatic, economic, development, and security tools. Assistance under the PSF is also coordinated across the interagency and used to complement other sources of funding, including from the Department and USAID.
Questions for the Record Submitted to
Secretary Antony Blinken by
Representative Joaquin Castro #15
House Committee on Foreign Affairs
March 23, 2023

Question:
Caribbean: The Biden Administration’s signature initiative to address climate and the energy transition in the Caribbean is PACC2030. Is specific Department funding being allocated for this initiative in FY 2024? If not, and this initiative is important to the Administration, why not?

Answer:
The U.S.-Caribbean Partnership to Address the Climate Crisis 2030 (PACC 2030) is our commitment to – and integration of – climate adaptation and resilience and clean energy programs across the Caribbean region. To that effect, President’s FY 2024 Budget Request includes $71.7 million for PACC 2030 through bilateral and regional assistance that would continue to support our Caribbean neighbors in strengthening their energy security and enhancing their adaptive and resilience capacity to climate change.
Questions for the Record Submitted to
Secretary Antony Blinken by
Representative Joaquin Castro #16
House Committee on Foreign Affairs
March 23, 2023

Question:

The Bahamas has not had a U.S. ambassador since 2011. How has the absence of a U.S. ambassador affected our relations with one of our closest neighbors?

Answer:

Relations between the United States and The Bahamas remain strong. While the absence of a confirmed U.S. ambassador is regrettable, it is not a reflection of the importance we place on our bilateral relationship. The Bahamas is a key democratic partner, and my team and I will continue to work closely with the Bahamian government to address shared regional challenges, such as irregular migration and the climate crisis. The Department continues to work closely with the Senate to confirm the President’s nominee, Mr. Calvin Smyre, as soon as possible.
Questions for the Record Submitted to
Secretary Antony Blinken by
Representative Joaquin Castro #17
House Committee on Foreign Affairs
March 23, 2023

Question:

Illegal Fishing in the Americas: Many observers have noted the problem of IUU fishing in the waters of South America and its negative effects on local fishing stocks and local industries. The U.S. Coast Guard and Southern Command have been involved in capacity-building efforts with partner nations to curb this problem. How will the State Department contribute to raising awareness and galvanizing action in the region?

Answer:

Illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing off the coast of South America poses economic, environmental, and maritime security threats, and is a priority for the Biden-Harris Administration. The Department leads a series of IUU fishing information exchanges in Latin America, including in support of the Eastern Tropical Pacific Marine Corridor (CMAR), which bring together U.S. government interagency experts, foreign government representatives, and civil society stakeholders to discuss tools for combating IUU fishing and establish critical partnerships.
Questions for the Record Submitted to
Secretary Antony Blinken by
Representative Gerald Connolly #1
House Committee on Foreign Affairs
March 23, 2023

Question:

During my two-year presidency of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly, we pushed to create a Center for Democratic Resilience within NATO Headquarters. Our commitment to shared democratic values is what distinguishes NATO from other military alliances. Without it, NATO is just another military block that does not like Russia. But this commitment cannot remain purely aspirational or rhetorical. It must be operationalized. Ambassador Janne Smith at NATO has done a remarkable job bringing our allies together in this time of consternation in Europe and making the U.S.’ voice heard as a stalwart advocate for the democratic institutions enshrined in the NATO charter. The Center for Democratic Resilience was the subject of a white paper, and only one country, Hungary, remains the last and only holdout. How do you plan to continue this drumbeat of support and engage your Hungarian counterparts to secure an abstention or even support for the creation of a Center for Democratic Resilience within NATO HQ?

Answer:

The United States Mission to NATO continues to raise support for the creation of a Center for Democratic Resilience at NATO HQ with all Allies at every opportunity, including at a North Atlantic Council meeting on February 20. Officials at the U.S. Embassy in Budapest have raised it with the Hungarian government and will continue to do so. Officials in the State
Department’s Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs also continue to raise it with officials at the Hungarian Embassy in Washington.
Questions for the Record Submitted to
Secretary Antony Blinken by
Representative Gerald Connolly #2
House Committee on Foreign Affairs
March 23, 2023

Question 2:

On March 4th, 2023, the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI) and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) released a joint statement that made clear that Iran, on a voluntary basis, will allow the IAEA to implement further appropriate verification and monitoring activities. What does this mean for the U.S. reengaging in JCPOA negotiations?

Answer:

We welcome Director General Grossi’s efforts to engage Iran on resolving longstanding questions related to Iran’s safeguards obligations and on applying additional monitoring measures at Iran’s nuclear facilities. Iran has made commitments to the IAEA Director General and should follow through on them promptly. While the JCPOA has not been on our agenda for months, President Biden’s commitment to never allowing Iran to acquire a nuclear weapon remains firm and we believe diplomacy is the best way to achieve that objective.
Questions for the Record Submitted to Secretary Antony Blinken by Representative Gerald Connolly #3
House Committee on Foreign Affairs
March 23, 2023

Question:

How does the administration intend to support the peaceful protestors that have been violently repressed by Iranian security services, continue to issue devastating sanctions against human rights violators, while prioritizing U.S. national security with regards to a nuclear Iran?

Answer:

We continue to take action to support the people of Iran, including by working closely with our allies and partners in the international community. We issued General License D-2, allowing U.S. companies to help Iranians better communicate using the internet. We also continue to impose and enforce sanctions on Iranian officials, including multiple rounds of sanctions on those demonstrably linked to suppression of protests. Meanwhile, President Biden remains committed to ensuring Iran never obtains a nuclear weapon. We believe diplomacy is the best way to achieve that goal.
Questions for the Record Submitted to Secretary Antony Blinken by Representative Gerald Connolly #4
House Committee on Foreign Affairs
March 23, 2023

Question:

Recently I signed a letter with 91 of my colleagues, as a supporter of a strong U.S.-Israel relationship, to both commend the Biden administration’s efforts to deescalate tensions in Israel and the West Bank and share our deep concern regarding planned changes to the structure of the judiciary. How does the administration intend to make clear to the new Israeli government that the United States will not support the evisceration of the Rule of Law in Israel, nor de jure or de facto annexation of parts of the West Bank that the judicial reforms can allow?

Answer:

The United States continues to work with Israel to advance shared interests and values at the heart of our decades-long relationship. The Administration has made clear to Israel U.S. concerns over Israel’s proposed judicial restructuring and that such fundamental changes require a broad basis of support to be durable. The United States is deeply concerned by recent violence in Israel and the West Bank and has been engaged with the parties to de-escalate tensions and take constructive steps to preserve the prospects of a two-state solution.
Questions for the Record Submitted to
Secretary Antony Blinken by
Representative Gerald Connolley #5
House Committee on Foreign Affairs
March 23, 2023

Question:

Unrest in Peru has broken out following the impeachment of President Pedro Castillo following an attempt to abrogate the constitution and dissolve Congress. It is estimated that 67 people have been killed in protests, and OHCHR has noted since 7 December 2022 the “disproportionate use of force and firearms by security forces, extrajudicial executions and mass arbitrary arrests.” What is the administration’s strategy in Peru to encourage an inclusive national dialogue, protection of peaceful protestors and bolster fragile democratic institutions in Peru?

Answer:

The Administration urged the Government of Peru to respect the rights to freedoms of expression and peaceful assembly and hold security forces accountable. We vet all security force units for credible information concerning gross human rights violations before transferring applicable assistance. We applaud the government’s efforts towards fulsome investigations, an inclusive national dialogue, and engagement with the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights and the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights to investigate alleged human rights abuses.
We remain committed to supporting Peru’s democratic institutions and working with Peruvian and regional partners to assist in these efforts.
Questions for the Record Submitted to
Secretary Antony Blinken by
Representative Gerald Connolly #6
House Committee on Foreign Affairs
March 23, 2023

Question:

The last two years the administration withheld $130 million, 10% percent of the total. With this in mind, can you explain why the administration would ask Congress to remove all of the human rights conditions for FY24 that allowed you to legally withhold these funds the last two years?

Answer:

The FY 2024 Request reflects the Administration’s intent to use foreign military financing (FMF) to support U.S. national security interests in Egypt, including for maritime security, border security, and counterterrorism. I continue to believe that maximum flexibility in our approach to FMF for Egypt provides the Administration the widest range of tools to address human rights concerns in Egypt. I have made clear to Egypt’s leaders that our relationship is stronger when there is tangible progress on human rights, and I have demonstrated my commitment to pursuing such progress.
Questions for the Record Submitted to
Secretary Antony Blinken by
Representative Gerald Connolly #7
House Committee on Appropriations
March 23, 2023

Question:

This October, we will come up on 5 years since Jamal Khashoggi was brutally murdered by a team of 15 Saudi agents who travelled to Turkey in a premeditated operation at the direction of Crown Prince Mohamed bin Salman. To this date, the administration has not secured justice for Jamal and his family. What is the administration’s plan for protecting Saudi dissidents and ensuring that no foreign leader can silence the voice of critics like Jamal Khashoggi?

Answer:

The Administration has taken important steps to address transnational repression, including by imposing a global visa restriction policy that gives us the ability to restrict and revoke visas for any individual involved in extraterritorial activities targeting perceived dissidents, including journalists and activists, for their work. We will continue our efforts to hold all foreign governments, including Saudi Arabia, accountable for such extraterritorial activities.
Questions for the Record Submitted to Secretary Antony Blinken by Representative Gerald Connolly #8 House Committee on Appropriations March 23, 2023

Question:

What actions, in addition to any that have been taken prior to March 23, 2023, will the administration take to hold accountable those responsible for orchestrating the murder of Jamal Khashoggi?

Answer:

The Administration announced a series of actions in response to the killing of Jamal Khashoggi: we released the Office of the Director of National Intelligence’s report on the killing, imposed visa restrictions on nearly 80 Saudi officials, and sanctioned Saudi officials and entities including the Royal Court’s Rapid Intervention Force. Using these tools from Congress, we continue to apply visa restrictions when warranted and regularly raise human rights concerns with our Saudi partners. We have made abundantly clear that the heinous killing of Jamal Khashoggi was unacceptable.
Questions for the Record Submitted to
Secretary Antony Blinken by
Representative Gerald Connolly #9
House Committee on Foreign Affairs
March 23, 2023

Question:

Specific to Department of State Afghan SIV Guidelines and DS157 Instructions, it has been brought to my attention by multiple constituents and SIV applicants that Verification of Employment in Afghanistan and the Letter of Recommendation requirements are difficult to provide, as many employer and supervisor contacts are no longer reachable, or the companies no longer exist. Many of my constituents worked directly with these applicants and have reached out expressing concerns with the employment verification requirements when they can otherwise prove they worked directly with these individuals. Has the Department considered alternative avenues to the employment verification requirement?

Answer:

The letters of employment and recommendation are core documents required under the Afghan Allies Protection Act; the Chief of Mission (COM) cannot approve an application for SIV eligibility without them. When an applicant submits a statement of unavailability of these documents, the U.S. government (USG) may be able to assist through Project Rabbit—a joint effort with the Department of Defense to verify employment for SIV
applicants who worked for participating employers. If the USG can verify employment for the applicant, the COM will adjudicate the case.
Questions for the Record Submitted to
Secretary Antony Blinken by
Representative Gerald Connolly #10
House Committee on Foreign Affairs
March 23, 2023

Question:

We are now two years into admirable State Department efforts to recruit and retain talented, diverse, and capable State Department employees. We have even seen some institutional changes, including overturning assignment restrictions and preclusions that had previously been imposed in an apparently haphazard and discriminatory manner. How is the Department recruiting, retaining, and promoting diverse talent, and after four years of evisceration of the foreign and civil service during the Trump administration, what is your assessment of progress in building back the Department?

Answer:

In FY 2022, the Department experienced the highest Foreign Service intake it has seen in a decade, with more than 809 FS personnel hired. We are currently on track to hire more than 1,000 Foreign Service personnel in FY 2023, which would be the largest intake since FY 2010. Civil Service hiring is also very robust: more than 1,800 CS personnel have been welcomed to the Department over the past 15 months and our CS workforce has eclipsed 2016 levels and is at an all-time high.
We now evaluate Civil and Foreign Service employee performance in part by how they advance diversity, equity, inclusion and accessibility. We also created a Retention Unit in the Bureau of Global Talent Management that is working on a strategy to ensure State prioritizes a workplace culture that attracts and retains talent.
Questions for the Record Submitted to Secretary Antony Blinken by Representative Gerald Connolly #11
House Committee on Foreign Affairs
March 23, 2023

Question:

On March 10th, 2022, it was announced that the Parliament of Georgia scrapped a proposed “foreign agents” proposal following massive protests in Tbilisi. How does the administration plan on continuing to support Georgia, its territorial integrity, especially in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, while backing democratic institutions, an independent judiciary, electoral reforms, and its Euro-Atlantic aspirations?

Answer:

The United States supports Georgia’s sovereignty and territorial integrity within its internationally recognized borders, and we continue to engage bilaterally and in international forums, including the Geneva International Discussions, to urge Russia to fulfill its commitments under the 2008 ceasefire agreement. The United States is a steadfast strategic partner in supporting Georgia’s Euro-Atlantic aspirations, including via our private and public engagement with the people of Georgia. We also maintain a robust assistance program to strengthen democratic institutions and processes, and judicial independence.
Questions for the Record Submitted to
Secretary Antony Blinken by
Representative Gerald Connolly # 12
House Committee on Foreign Affairs
March 23, 2023

Question:

How has the Department of State implemented the recommendations made in AUD-MERO-21-43 (September 2021) and AUD-MERO-21-37 (July 2021) to ensure the fair competition of State Department contracts?

Answer:

In response to the audit reports cited, the Department has taken steps to implement policy and internal controls that bolster the quality of procurement activity and lead to a culture change that drives a higher return on investment of our acquisitions. Specifically, the execution of an Enterprise Business Review Committee, Procurement Planning Conferences, Partnership Agreements, and Industry Engagement sessions set the foundation for building appropriate strategies and set realistic milestones well in advance of contract expiration.
Questions for the Record Submitted to
Secretary Antony Blinken by
Representative Gerald Connolly #13
House Committee on Foreign Affairs
March 23, 2023

Question:

Recently, American company Vulcan Materials reached a provisional agreement with CEMEX to reenter its property just weeks after Mexican armed forces, state police, and special investigative forces seized its property. While this is a welcome development, it underscores a concern that the Mexican government would use force to overtake American investments in the country. Given an increase in U.S. investment in Mexico following the negotiation of USMCA and passage of the CHIPS and Science Act, how does the Department of State plan on ensuring U.S. investments can be secure in Mexico moving forward?

Answer:

We share your concern about the treatment of U.S. companies in Mexico. We speak regularly with Mexican officials about our expectation that U.S. companies are treated fairly and in accordance with all trade obligations. We also highlight that cases like these have the potential to impact Mexico’s ability to attract future investment and negatively impact our ability to achieve our shared goal of improving livelihoods for Mexico’s citizens.
Questions for the Record Submitted to Secretary Antony Blinken by Representative Jason Crow #1 House Committee on Foreign Affairs March 23, 2023

Question:

Secretary Blinken, the State Department has done a great job in providing oversight of critical aid to Ukraine, including through convening the interagency working group. I recently wrote to State regarding Ukraine oversight and passed an NDAA amendment last year, and I appreciate your commitment to this issue. As Congress continues to work with State on this oversight, one area for greater collaboration is on the embassy cap. To date, the IGs from State, DOD, and USAID have traveled to Ukraine, Poland, and Germany in furtherance of their coordinated oversight of U.S. assistance to Ukraine. It is my understanding that the State Department embassy cap is limiting IG staff from traveling to Ukraine. Their efforts to conduct audits, inspections, investigations, and evaluation are complicated when forced to work from outside Ukraine. Do you agree with the assessment that the IGs cannot conduct adequate oversight from outside Ukraine?

Answer:

I thoroughly appreciate the vital role the Office of the Inspector General (OIG) plays. I am committed to ensuring the OIG offices have our maximum support to conduct oversight of U.S. assistance to Ukraine on the ground as the security situation allows. Embassy Kyiv will be adding permanent OIG positions from State, DoD, and USAID to their staffing pattern. Pending their arrival, we are facilitating OIG visits on a TDY basis. I
am committed to implementing our very important policy and oversight objectives, in a way that is consistent with current security conditions.
Questions for the Record Submitted to
Secretary Antony Blinken by
Representative Jason Crow #2
House Committee on Foreign Affairs
March 23, 2023

Question:

Secretary Blinken, will you consider adjusting the US personnel cap for Ukraine to allow temporary opportunities for IG personnel to conduct oversight activities on Ukraine?

Answer:

I thoroughly appreciate the vital role the Office of the Inspector General (OIG) plays and support a robust on-the-ground OIG presence. Embassy Kyiv will have a permanent OIG presence for the State Department, USAID, and Defense Department. Separately, the State Department is actively reviewing personnel needs with an eye to security and logistics concerns. Pending their permanent deployment, OIG personnel are traveling to Embassy Kyiv on a temporary deployment basis; OIG personnel from DOS, DOD, and USAID recently visited Embassy Kyiv.

The Department continues to follow up internally and with other executive branch counterparts including DOD and NSC to ensure the right
balance of in-country staffing numbers, in-country travel, and additional armored vehicle transit availability. Our aim is to implement our policy objectives in a way that is consistent with current security conditions.
Questions for the Record Submitted to  
Secretary Antony Blinken by  
Congressman Jason Crow #3  
House Committee on Foreign Affairs  
March 23, 2023

Question:

In September, the Afghan Fund was created to protect, preserve, and make targeted disbursements of $3.5 billion in Afghan central bank reserves to provide greater stability to the economy of Afghanistan. Last fall I led a letter with Representative Malinowski regarding the pause in negotiations on the trust fund mechanism for the frozen assets, and I appreciated State’s response and your continued engagement with the World Bank and others on continued humanitarian assistance. We hear, however, that the Afghan Fund in Geneva is not yet making disbursements to alleviate the humanitarian situation in Afghanistan and stabilize the economy, as was originally intended. Secretary Blinken, can you explain the challenges in implementing the Afghan Fund and how that relates to some of the overall challenges in providing humanitarian aid in Afghanistan?

Answer:

The board of the Fund for the Afghan People (the Afghan Fund) is developing safeguards that will help ensure future disbursements are used for their intended purposes. This includes hiring a reputable auditor and a compliance service provider as well as the development of risk-based Anti-Money Laundering/Combating the Financing of Terrorism policies for the Afghan Fund. Any disbursement would require consensus from the board.
and would need to be approved by the Bank for International Settlements, which would use its own review processes before executing any disbursements.
Questions for the Record Submitted to
Secretary Antony Blinken by
Congressman Jason Crow #4
House Committee on Foreign Affairs
March 23, 2023

Question:

Secretary Blinken, what is the timeline for [the Afghan Fund] disbursing funds and what is the State Department doing to facilitate disbursement?

Answer:

The Fund is a non-profit foundation organized under Swiss law. Although the U.S. government has a seat on the Fund’s Board of Trustees, the Fund makes decisions on a unanimous basis. The United States cannot speak to when the Fund may make disbursements in the future. It can speak only to the views it has as a member of the Board. We will advocate for the Fund to make timely and principled disbursements that bolster Afghanistan’s macroeconomic stability.
Questions for the Record Submitted to
Secretary Antony Blinken by
Representative Warren Davidson #1
House Committee on Foreign Affairs
March 23, 2023

Question:

The Trump administration negotiated an agreement in February 2020 to withdraw from Afghanistan – more than a year before the withdrawal occurred. The Biden Administration, including Secretary Blinken, knew this when they took office. Even after the Administration extended the date to September 11, our Armed Forces were obviously not prepared to withdraw. Why were our servicemembers ill-prepared to execute an orderly withdrawal?

Answer:

For over a year, the State Department engaged in contingency planning for a range of scenarios and was in close, daily contact with senior officials at the Department of Defense in the lead up to and during the withdrawal from Afghanistan. U.S. Embassy Kabul completed an exercise in December 2020 to prepare for a potential large-scale non-combatant evacuation operation. I refer you to Department of Defense regarding the U.S. military’s preparations.
Questions for the Record Submitted to Secretary Antony Blinken by Representative Warren Davidson #2
House Committee on Foreign Affairs
March 23, 2023

Question:

Secretary Blinken previously testified that the Trump administration was responsible for the failed execution of the Afghanistan withdrawal, stating, “We [the Biden Administration] inherited a deadline. We did not inherit a plan.” Please identify the individual(s) that created the withdrawal plan under President Biden. Why was the plan crafted so that our Armed Forces left Afghanistan before all civilians had departed?

Answer:

Planning for the withdrawal was an interagency – not an individual – effort. U.S. Embassy Kabul completed an exercise in December 2020 to prepare for a potential large-scale non-combatant evacuation operation. Our non-combatant evacuation operation coordination and preparation allowed the United States and our partners to successfully relocate more than 124,000 people from Afghanistan. We defer to Department of Defense regarding the timing of military personnel departing Afghanistan.
Questions for the Record Submitted to
Secretary Antony Blinken by
Representative Warren Davidson #3
House Committee on Foreign Affairs
March 23, 2023

Question:

The Abbey Gate bombing killed 13 U.S. servicemembers. As a result of their
deaths, was anyone in the Biden Administration disciplined or fired?

Answer:

No State Department personnel were found at fault for the ISIS-K
attack at the Kabul airport. I refer you to other agencies regarding their
personnel.
Questions for the Record Submitted to Secretary Antony Blinken by Representative Warren Davidson #4
House Committee on Foreign Affairs
March 23, 2023

Question:

The war between Russia and Ukraine has gone on for more than a year now. The United States has committed $113 billion and near-tactical participation. According to the Biden Administration, what is America’s mission in Ukraine? If not one of these options, please elaborate: (1) encouraging both parties to enter peace negotiations as soon as possible; (2) taking back the Donbass region, plus other territories invaded by Russia in 2022; (3) re-establishing control of territories pre-annexation of Crimea; (4) convicting Putin and others in the Kremlin of alleged-war crimes.

Answer:

The United States’ goal is an independent, democratic, and economically stable Ukraine governed by the rule of law and integrated into Euro-Atlantic institutions. The Department is prioritizing helping Ukraine defend itself against Russia’s aggression and improving its ability to liberate territory that Russia has seized. We also are considering ways the U.S. government can build Ukraine’s capacity to deter aggression long-term and support holding Russia to account for atrocities and other war crimes through appropriate and viable justice mechanisms.
Questions for the Record Submitted to
Secretary Antony Blinken by
Representative Warren Davidson #5
House Committee on Foreign Affairs
March 23, 2023

Question:

The United States has spent more than $113 billion in supplemental funding for the war between Russia and Ukraine. Has the Biden Administration set a cap on the amount of funding the United States will spend on this conflict? If so, how much?

Answer:

The supplemental assistance funding Congress authorized for Ukraine has provided a vital lifeline to help Ukraine counter Russia’s brutal aggression, stabilize our partners in the region and globally, and strengthen our alliances. We will continue to work with Allies and partners to share the costs caused by Russia’s war. President Biden and I are committed to working with Congress on any further resource requests during this momentous time.
Questions for the Record Submitted to Secretary Antony Blinken by Representative Warren Davidson #6
House Committee on Foreign Affairs
March 23, 2023

Question:

What efforts are being made by the Biden Administration to ensure European burden-sharing in the war between Russia and Ukraine? Please detail the actions taken by the Biden Administration to ensure NATO allies are paying their fair share.

Answer:

The Biden-Harris Administration is committed to ensuring Allies equitably share the responsibility of NATO’s collective security by investing in the capabilities, readiness, and force generation needed to maintain a credible deterrence and defense posture and fulfill NATO missions and operations. We will continue consulting with Allies and with Congress to ensure NATO has sufficient, capable, and ready forces required to realize these commitments.

Financial and materiel contributions of lethal aid to Ukraine occur bilaterally and do not impact NATO burden sharing.
Questions for the Record Submitted to
Secretary Antony Blinken by
Representative Warren Davidson #7
House Committee on Foreign Affairs
March 23, 2023

Question:
When and why did the United States abandon the Monroe Doctrine’s focus on the Western Hemisphere?

Answer:
The United States continues to promote the security of its partners in the Western Hemisphere, as well as its own. Our partners are entitled to individual sovereignty, and we continue to work closely with them to ensure our security interests remain aligned.
Questions for the Record Submitted to Secretary Antony Blinken by Representative Warren Davidson #8
House Committee on Foreign Affairs
March 23, 2023

Question:

If you think this Administration hasn’t, then please explain the failure to confront the CCP’s inroads into Central and South America, as well as China’s role in the fentanyl supply chain.

Answer:

The United States is addressing the PRC’s inroads into the Western Hemisphere through extensive and productive diplomatic, economic, and security dialogues with our partners in the region. The Department continues to press Beijing and expand efforts to strengthen international cooperation to stop the criminal diversion of unscheduled chemicals to illicit synthetic drug production.
 Questions for the Record Submitted to
Secretary Antony Blinken by
Representative Sydney Kamlager-Dove #1
House Committee on Foreign Affairs
March 23, 2023

Question:

The March 2023 UN climate change report was a stark reminder that the clock is ticking on the future of our planet, and that decisions we make in the next decade will be determinative for generations to come. Even as new crises fill the headlines, climate action is not something that can be left on the backburner—the warming of our planet continues regardless of what else is happening in the world, and continues to pose an existential threat to our national security. How does this budget equip the State Department to lead the international community in taking drastic and immediate measures to curb emissions, and to support vulnerable countries who contributed the least but are suffering the most from climate change?

Answer:

The FY 2024 Budget supports the President’s pledges to work with Congress to quadruple U.S. international climate financing to over $11 billion annually and achieve more than $3 billion for the President’s Emergency Plan for Adaptation and Resilience. This includes $4.3 billion for State and USAID programs to expand the clean energy economy; conserve, restore, and sustainably manage forests; enhance the resilience of
communities, infrastructure, and supply chains to natural hazards; and mainstream climate considerations across key development sectors.
Questions for the Record Submitted to
Secretary Antony Blinken by
Representative Sydney Kamlager-Dove #2
House Committee on Foreign Affairs
March 23, 2023

Question:

Latin America and the Caribbean: Last summer, the Summit of the Americas was held in my city of Los Angeles, and was a valuable opportunity to address shared challenges and goals with many of our neighbors in the hemisphere. Several important commitments came out of the Summit, including the State Department’s announcement of a new Digital Agenda for Transformation in the Americas initiative. I believe digital development is a critical component of sustainable economic growth and I was very pleased to see the United States commit to improve digital infrastructure, access, and skills in the region. What progress has been made to date on implementing this initiative and how will it fit into the Regional Agenda for Digital Transformation announced by participating governments at the Summit?

Answer:

The Digital Agenda for Transformation in the Americas (DATA) initiative reflects the Administration's whole-of-government approach to supporting digital development in line with leaders’ “Regional Agenda for Digital Transformation” Summit commitment. Implementation activities include interagency technical assistance to partner countries on 5G network security, digital infrastructure financing, and other related priorities building
on engagements under the Digital Connectivity and Cybersecurity Partnership (DCCP), as well as dialogues with other Summit governments.
Questions for the Record Submitted to Secretary Antony Blinken by Representative Sydney Kamlager-Dove #3
House Committee on Foreign Affairs
March 23, 2023

Question:

The African continent is brimming with potential that the United States can invest in, unleash, and benefit from, and the numerous commitments that came out of the US-Africa Leaders’ Summit made me hopeful for a new chapter of deepened engagement with the continent. I was glad to see the MOU signed with the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) Secretariat, especially given that AfCFTA negotiations and implementation have lost some momentum amid the impacts of COVID-19 and Russia’s war in Ukraine. How does the State Department plan to support our African partners in fully implementing this agreement and what are the current challenges to doing so?

Answer:

The MOU signed between USTR and the AfCFTA Secretariat is an important step to guide our engagement on AfCFTA issues. The State Department has funded programs at the Secretariat to guide businesses and investors who wish to leverage the free trade area. These include a small business development center, a digital trade advisor, and an investment advisor, but implementation has been delayed by the AfCFTA Secretariat’s capacity and staffing limitations.
Questions for the Record Submitted to
Secretary Antony Blinken by
Representative Sydney Kamlager-Dove #4
House Committee on Foreign Affairs
March 23, 2023

Question:

Educational and Cultural Exchange: My district in Los Angeles is the arts and entertainment capital of the world, and I have a deep appreciation for the power of film, music, and sports to deepen people-to-people ties and promote cultural understanding. How does this budget ensure that educational and cultural exchange programs, especially ones that draw on the power of the arts, can continue supporting and enriching our most important partnerships abroad?

Answer:

The President’s FY 2024 budget supports exchange programs that showcase the creative talent in the United States by sending award-winning films and industry leaders to missions overseas. The budget request also supports music diplomacy programs that bring U.S. and international musicians together as well as sports diplomacy programs that engage with athletes and sports organizations to use culture and sport as a gateway to support broader U.S. foreign policy priorities.
Questions for the Record Submitted to
Secretary Antony Blinken by
Representative Tom Kean Jr. #1
House Committee on Foreign Affairs
March 23, 2023

Question:

Secretary Blinken, I am greatly troubled and concerned regarding recent developments related to the situation in Nagorno Karabakh. Could you speak to the latest U.S.-led efforts to facilitate peace discussions between Armenia and Azerbaijan?

Answer:

The United States remains committed to promoting a peaceful, democratic, and prosperous future for the South Caucasus region. As I have emphasized, the United States is committed to Armenia-Azerbaijan negotiations, the only way to achieve an enduring peace. We continue to facilitate discussions between Armenia and Azerbaijan – bilaterally, with partners, and through multilateral organizations, including when I hosted the leaders for peace talks in Munich in February 2023 and the foreign ministers at Blair House in November 2022.
Questions for the Record Submitted to
Secretary Antony Blinken by
Representative Tom Kean Jr. #2
House Committee on Foreign Affairs
March 23, 2023

Question:

I am gravely concerned to see a lack of U.S. leadership on the issue regarding freedom of movement in the Lachin corridor, particularly given the recent announcement by the Russian government to prioritize mediation on the matter. Could you elaborate on State’s role in negotiations regarding Lachin corridor?

Answer:

As of March 23, the Lachin corridor remains impeded for private and commercial vehicles. The Department of State has called for the reopening of the roadway publicly and privately. This was an integral part of my engagement with President Aliyev and Prime Minister Pashinyan in Munich on February 18, underscoring the need for free and open commercial and private transit through the Lachin corridor. I also called on the parties to open other transportation routes. U.S. engagement is playing a key role in advancing the peace process between Armenia and Azerbaijan, including through my trilateral meeting with leaders in Munich.
Questions for the Record Submitted to Secretary Antony Blinken by Representative Tom Kean Jr. #3 House Committee on Foreign Affairs March 23, 2023

Question:

I was pleased to see the success of the negotiations related to Finland’s ascension into NATO. However, I am troubled that there is still much work to be done related to Sweden’s membership. What are some of the current plans related to the next steps in securing Sweden’s membership in NATO?

Answer:

The Administration strongly supports Sweden’s immediate accession to NATO and is working with Türkiye, Sweden, and the NATO Secretary General to address Türkiye’s concerns over Sweden’s membership. Swedish officials have intensified counterterrorism cooperation with Türkiye. In addition, stronger counterterrorism legislation will enter into effect in Sweden in June. Sweden is actively seeking to strengthen dialogue and cooperation in additional security-related areas with Türkiye.
Questions for the Record Submitted to Secretary Antony Blinken by Representative Tom Kean Jr. #4 House Committee on Foreign Affairs March 23, 2023

Question:

In 2019, talks began with the United Kingdom regarding the possibility of a free trade agreement with the United States in light of Brexit. Despite the recent success of the British negotiations with the European Union regarding the Windsor Framework, there have been few indications regarding the possibility of renewed discussions concerning a free trade agreement with the United Kingdom. In the coming months, will there be renewed discussions concerning a free trade agreement with the United Kingdom?

Answer:

We welcome the UK-EU Windsor Framework and believe it will help improve UK and EU prosperity and expand avenues for trade. In the last year, we held multiple U.S.-UK trade dialogues including the Future of Transatlantic Trade, the Small and Medium Enterprise Dialogue, the Comprehensive Dialogue on Technology and Data, and the Financial Regulatory Working Group, and we continue to explore ways to deepen our trade relationship. President Biden and PM Sunak directed their teams to work intensively on our shared economic agenda ahead of the G7 Summit.
Questions for the Record Submitted to
Secretary Antony Blinken by
Representative Tom Kean Jr. #5
House Committee on Foreign Affairs
March 23, 2023

Question:

Mr. Secretary, it is well recognized that we have many generic medicines that are dependent on China for sourcing and which have a long history of drug shortages in the U.S. There are more than 20,000 brand and generic medicines in the U.S., and we know we have more significant challenges with generic medicines. Given that, can you tell us whether and how the Administration is focusing on where we have the most serious vulnerabilities in our medication supply chain? Particularly with regard to generic antibiotics primarily sourced from China.

Answer:

Since the President issued E.O. 14001 and E.O. 14017, we have worked closely with interagency partners to identify critical dependencies and bottlenecks in our most important supply chains, including pharmaceuticals.

In addition to efforts by the Department of Health and Human Services to bolster domestic production, we have collaborated with allies and other trusted partners to boost pharmaceutical supply chain transparency, diversification, security, and sustainability.
Question:

Secretary Blinken, following the Biden administration’s hasty withdrawal from Afghanistan, Al Qaeda, ISIS-K, and other terrorist groups now enjoy more freedom to operate and threaten the United States and our regional partners than at any time in recent history. This is especially concerning considering the U.S. mission in Afghanistan was to ensure that the nation would never be able to be used again as a base for terrorist attacks against the homeland and our interests. How does the State Department plan to address the threat these groups pose, whether directly or by supporting our partners in the region?

Answer:

The President promised Americans that we would maintain an enduring capacity to address terrorist threats in Afghanistan. In July 2022, he demonstrated that capability in the successful operation that killed Ayman al-Zawahiri. We continue to press the Taliban to adhere to its counterterrorism commitments while we work with our South and Central Asian partners to expand security cooperation programs focused on bolstering regional capabilities to counter terrorism and drug trafficking and enhance border security.
Questions for the Record Submitted to Secretary Antony Blinken by Representative Tom Kean Jr. #7
House Committee on Foreign Affairs
March 23, 2023

Question:

Over the course of the last year, we have seen that misguided fears have slowed down the Administration’s provision of critical weapons to Ukraine, thereby prolonging this war. Yet, over the past year, the U.S. and its allies and partners have gradually stepped up our lethal support for Ukraine with no tangible retaliation from Russia. The Ukrainians have requested F-16s, which would help them close their skies to enemy jets, missiles, and drones. The Dutch recently signaled an openness to facilitate the delivery of some of their F-16s to Ukraine. How is the Administration responding to requests from Ukraine and from countries willing to transfer U.S.-origin aircraft to Ukraine?

Answer:

The Departments of State and Defense, with our partners in Kyiv, continuously assess Ukraine’s military requirements. We have focused on Ukraine’s most critical needs; artillery, ammunition, air defense, armor, and fighting vehicles. Our assistance has included multiple advanced systems such as HIMARS, PATRIOT, and NASAMS air defense systems. We continue to address how to best meet these needs and are working closely with...
dozens of countries that have provided support to Ukraine, including aircraft.
Questions for the Record Submitted to Secretary Antony Blinken by Representative Tom Kean Jr. #8 House Committee on Foreign Affairs March 23, 2023

Question:
How long would training for Ukrainian pilots and maintainers for F-16s take?

Answer:
Timelines can vary for each individual depending on education level, English language proficiency, and individual aptitudes for tactics, techniques, and procedures offered during basic F-16 training. United States Air Force students typically take 12-18 months for F-16 qualification training once initial pilot training is complete, and training slots become available at the Flight Training Unit. The same considerations and training timelines also affect maintenance and support personnel.
Questions for the Record Submitted to
Secretary Antony Blinken by
Representative Tom Kean Jr. #9
House Committee on Foreign Affairs
March 23, 2023

Question:

How much do you estimate the transfer of F-16s would cost?

Answer:

Should the Administration decide to provide F-16s to Ukraine, such a transfer could be implemented under a number of different authorities, including Foreign Military Sales, Presidential Drawdown Authority, as Excess Defense Articles, or a possible combination of those options. There would be different costs depending on the authority used, the variant of the aircraft, and how much downstream costs are involved (such as facility upgrades, maintenance, and training requirements). As such, I am unable to provide you with such an estimate and would refer you to the Department of Defense for any further analysis of the question.
Question 10:

The Republic of South Africa has increasingly used its stated stance of foreign policy “non-alignment” as a pretense to justify closer relations with Russia and the PRC. This is clearly shown by South Africa’s hosting of military exercises with Russia and the PRC last month on the anniversary of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. Equally, ANC leadership has accused the US of “patronizing bullying” for its support of the Ukraine war effort. With these recent developments in mind, what is your assessment of the current U.S.—South African bilateral relationship?

Answer 10:

South Africa is an important partner across many areas vital to U.S. policy in Africa. My visit to South Africa in August 2022 as well as South African President Ramaphosa’s visit to Washington the following month solidified our shared commitments to deepening such cooperation. With that said, South Africa’s position on Russia’s invasion of Ukraine is troubling, and I and other senior officials have made this clear to South African counterparts. As a global leader on human rights and democracy, South Africa could choose to play a constructive role in calling out Russia’s
violation of the UN Charter and unprovoked aggression and full-scale war in Ukraine – as many South African civil society and other voices have noted.
Questions for the Record Submitted to
Secretary Antony Blinken by
Representative Tom Kean Jr. #11
House Committee on Foreign Affairs
March 23, 2023

Question 11:
And how do you see this evolving in the near future?

Answer 11:

South Africa will continue to be an important partner. For example, we cooperate with South Africa on critical longstanding, bipartisan priorities on health in Africa. South Africa is also our largest trading partner in Africa. In these and other areas, we will continue to work closely with South Africa, even as we must balance these priorities alongside our serious disagreement with the South African government over Russia’s unprovoked aggression and full-scale war against Ukraine.
Questions for the Record Submitted to 
Secretary Antony Blinken by 
Representative Tom Kean Jr. #12 
House Committee on Foreign Affairs 
March 23, 2023

Question:

Russia continues to exert considerable influence in Central Asia, with military bases in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan and having deployed Russian paratroopers to Kazakhstan to put down protests last year. In 2022, Vladimir Putin visited all five Central Asian republics. Your recent trip to Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan was the first cabinet-level trip to Central Asia since 2020. How can the U.S. increase our security cooperation and strengthen our overall bilateral relationships with the countries of Central Asia when there has been so little high-level engagement from senior administration officials?

Answer:

We have engaged Central Asian leaders more frequently over the past year than at any time since Central Asian countries’ independence, precisely because these countries are increasingly keen to diversify partnerships beyond Russia. In addition to my recent visit, we have hosted dozens of senior Central Asian officials over the past few months, including bilateral strategic dialogues with each country and a C5+1 ministerial in New York in September 2022. The United States is seizing the moment, including
through increased security cooperation, to be a reliable partner to the region.
Questions for the Record Submitted to Secretary Antony Blinken by Representative Tom Kean Jr. #13 House Committee on Foreign Affairs March 23, 2023

Question:

What is your strategy to compete with Russia in Central Asia?

Answer:

We have long been committed to supporting the sovereignty, territorial integrity, and independence of the Central Asian states. Geography dictates that Central Asia countries cooperate with their bigger and more powerful neighbors is a necessity rather than a choice. We are accelerating efforts to make Central Asia a place where American companies can do business and help connect critical Central Asian resources with international markets. We are increasing our engagement with the region to demonstrate that we are a reliable partner, and we are increasingly the partner of choice in both the economic and security spheres.
Questions for the Record Submitted to
Secretary Antony Blinken by
Representative Tom Kean Jr. #14
House Committee on Foreign Affairs
March 23, 2023

Question:

What is the Biden administration doing to make real inroads in helping the Central Asian countries decrease their dependence on Russia?

Answer:

Since the beginning of Russia’s war against Ukraine, the Biden-Harris Administration, with the assistance of Congress, has provided over $41.5 million in additional assistance to the region. Of this, $16.5 million promotes food security and $25 million is being programmed through the Economic Resilience in Central Asia Initiative (ERICEN) to help retrain workers to reduce unemployment, pilot new non-Russian trade routes, and help private sector businesses succeed and grow. We are working with Congress to provide $20 million more for ERICEN programming to decrease Central Asia’s dependence on Russia to support developing modern, diverse economies.
Questions for the Record Submitted to Secretary Antony Blinken by Representative Michael McCaul #1 House Committee on Foreign Affairs March 23, 2023

Question:

How does the State Department distinguish Detainees from Hostages?

Answer:

Presidential Policy Directive 30 defines hostage-taking as the unlawful abduction or holding of a person(s) against their will to compel a third person or governmental organization to do or abstain from doing any act as a condition for the release of the person detained. This directive is focused on actions by non-state actors, such as terrorist or criminal groups. In contrast, "arbitrary" detentions refer to detentions of individuals by a state actor that amount to a violation of the detained individual’s right to liberty under Article 9 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.
Questions for the Record Submitted to
Secretary Antony Blinken by
Representative Michael McCaul #2
House Committee on Foreign Affairs
March 23, 2023

Question:
Why does the Department view Americans being held by the Taliban as detainees rather than hostages?

Answer:
The United States has not yet made a decision as to whether to recognize the Taliban or any other entity as the Government of Afghanistan or as part of such a government, and therefore does not consider the Taliban as having the state’s authority to arrest or detain anyone, including U.S. nationals. Regardless of a case’s designation, we continue to apply the same level of resources and pursue their release with equal vigor.
Questions for the Record Submitted to Secretary Antony Blinken by Representative Michael McCaul #3
House Committee on Foreign Affairs
March 23, 2023

Question:

What is the State Department’s estimate of the number of ISIS members, Al Qaeda members, and other terror group members in Afghanistan?

Answer:

The State Department concurs with interagency estimates that there are approximately 2,000 to 2,500 ISIS-Khorasan fighters in Afghanistan, along with 100 to 200 al-Qa’ida in the Indian Subcontinent fighters. We also estimate 3,000 to 4,000 Tehrik-e Taliban Pakistan members are present in Afghanistan, along with 100 to 200 Jamaat Ansarullah members.
Questions for the Record Submitted to
Secretary Antony Blinken by
Representative Michael McCaul #4
House Committee on Foreign Affairs
March 23, 2023

Question:

The Biden Administration has highlighted the Indo-Pacific as critical to U.S. national security. In the Biden National Security Strategy, the Indo-Pacific’s importance is highlighted, stating “No region will be of more significance to the world and to everyday Americans than the Indo-Pacific.” Yet in the FY24 Diplomatic Programs budget, East Asian and Pacific Affairs was the fourth largest bureau and only received 9% of the Overseas Program’s budget. Why is the department saying that the Indo-Pacific is the most important, but budgeting it as the fourth most important?

Answer:

The Biden-Harris Administration shares your commitment to the Indo-Pacific. Our FY 2024 Request proposes a 14.5% ($60.1 million) increase for the Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs (EAP), the largest increase and second largest budget of any region. EAP also received the largest three-year personnel increase of any Department bureau from FY 2022 to FY 2024, which reflects our commitment to scaling up at a pace that ensures adequate management support for increased personnel. In addition to resources for the EAP bureau, the FY 2024 Budget requests both mandatory
and discretionary resources to outcompete China and strengthen the U.S. role in the Indo-Pacific.
Questions for the Record Submitted to Secretary Antony Blinken by Representative Michael McCaul #5 House Committee on Foreign Affairs March 22, 2023

Question:

Under the National Security Strategy, the Biden Administration stated that the Indo-Pacific is vital and that “We will expand our regional diplomatic, development, and economic engagement, with a particular focus on Southeast Asia and the Pacific Islands.” Yet, East Asia and the Pacific were only allocated approximately 12% of the Development Assistance budget, the fourth largest in the budget. Why is that?

Answer:

The FY 2024 President’s Budget requests both mandatory and discretionary resources to strengthen the U.S. role in the Indo-Pacific, out-compete China, and advance American prosperity globally through new investments. In addition to the $2.1 billion discretionary request for the Indo-Pacific -- a 19 percent increase over FY 2023 appropriations -- the mandatory proposal includes $2 billion over five years to make game-changing investments in the Indo-Pacific to strengthen partner economies and support their efforts in pushing back against predatory efforts and $7.1 billion over 20 years to implement amended and extended economic
assistance provisions of the Compacts of Free Association (COFA) with the Freely Associated States (FAS) of the Federated States of Micronesia, the Marshall Islands, and Palau.
Questions for the Record Submitted to Secretary Antony Blinken by Representative Michael McCaul #6
House Committee on Foreign Affairs
March 23, 2023

Question:

The Biden Administration has touted the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity (or IPEF) in its Indo-Pacific Strategy, as it will “advance resilience, sustainability, inclusiveness, economic growth, fairness, and competitiveness for our economies.” Under the Economic Support Fund, it states the East Asian and Pacific portion “provides robust funding to support [Indo-Pacific Strategy] goals, advance the IPEF, and promote regional and multilateral institutions.” Yet, the East Asia and Pacific ESF budget is only 4% of the requested budget, and East Asia and the Pacific ESF budget is approximately $575 million less than the Green Climate Fund. Why is that?

Answer:

The FY 2024 President’s Budget requests both mandatory and discretionary resources to strengthen the U.S. role in the Indo-Pacific, out-compete China, and advance American prosperity globally through new investments. In addition to the $2.1 billion discretionary request for the Indo-Pacific, a 19 percent increase over FY 2023 appropriations, the mandatory proposal includes $2 billion over five years to make game-changing investments in the Indo-Pacific to strengthen partner economies and support their efforts in pushing back against predatory efforts and $7.1
billion over 20 years to implement amended and extended economic
assistance provisions of the Compacts of Free Association (COFA) with the
Freely Associated States (FAS) of the Federated States of Micronesia, the
Marshall Islands, and Palau.
Questions for the Record Submitted to
Secretary Antony Blinken by
Representative Michael McCaul #7
House Committee on Foreign Affairs
March 23, 2023

Question:

Under the Economic Support Fund in FY22, why did we allocate $12 million to China?

Answer:

The FY 2022 Joint Explanatory Statement accompanying the Department of State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs Appropriations Act, 2022 directs $12 million in Economic Support Funds to the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor for programs in the People’s Republic of China (PRC). The funds support non-governmental organizations focused on the protection and advancement of freedoms of expression, association, peaceful assembly, and religion for women, human rights activists, and ethnic and religious minorities in the PRC.
Questions for the Record Submitted to
Secretary Antony Blinken by
Representative Michael McCaul #8
House Committee on Foreign Affairs
March 23, 2023

Question:
What was the purpose of giving our strategic competitor $12 million for their economic development?

Answer:

The FY 2022 Joint Explanatory Statement accompanying the Department of State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs Appropriations Act, 2022 directs $12 million in Economic Support Funds to the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor for programs in the People’s Republic of China (PRC). The funds support non-governmental organizations focused on the protection and advancement of freedoms of expression, association, peaceful assembly, and religion for women, human rights activists, and ethnic and religious minorities in the PRC.
Questions for the Record Submitted to
Secretary Antony Blinken by
Representative Michael McCaul #9
House Committee on Foreign Affairs
March 23, 2023

Question:

We say that our asymmetric advantage against the PRC is our networks of alliances and partners in the theater, but the budget does not reflect this. Under IMET funding which helps foreign military service members learn U.S. doctrine, build interoperability, and build long lasting relationships with our own military leadership, why is the East Asia and Pacific request the second smallest, receiving only 12% of the budget?

Answer:

International Military Education and Training (IMET) is not our only tool for advancing our defense posture or foreign policy in the Indo-Pacific. Partners’ absorptive capacity is a key consideration when building our budget priorities – many of our Indo-Pacific partners are unable to expend existing IMET that is being made available because of a lack of English language proficiency. Some partners do not have ministries of defense. We are reviewing all available authorities to bolster support for critical partners in the region and are using other tools to expand English language
proficiency to assist these partners in taking advantage of IMET opportunities.
Questions for the Record Submitted to Secretary Antony Blinken by Representative Michael McCaul #10 House Committee on Foreign Affairs March 23, 2023

Question: Why did the State Department not ask for any of the IMET budget for Taiwan?

Answer:

The $125,425,000 in total global International Military Education and Training (IMET) in the FY 2024 request balances obligations made to countries for IMET in recent years with emerging priorities, taking into account partners’ ability to finance Professional Military Education (PME) with their national funds. Taiwan is a high-income economy capable of supporting a multi-billion-dollar defense budget and sends students to attend PME courses in the United States. annually. That said, providing Taiwan with IMET could reduce Taiwan’s costs to buy into professional military education, and we are examining our options in this regard.
Questions for the Record Submitted to
Secretary Antony Blinken by
Representative Michael McCaul #11
House Committee on Foreign Affairs
March 23, 2023

Question: Do we not want the Taiwanese military to be better trained or develop relationships with their U.S. counterparts?

Answer:

We want the Taiwanese military to be well trained and to develop close relationships with their U.S. counterparts. Both are important aspects of military proficiency and interoperability. We are grateful for the direction in the Taiwan Enhanced Resiliency Act of 2023 to "establish or expand a comprehensive training program with Taiwan," and are working to implement that guidance.
Questions for the Record Submitted to Secretary Antony Blinken by Representative Michael McCaul #12 House Committee on Foreign Affairs March 23, 2023

Question: If IMET is not the way forward, what funds are there to use to train Taiwan’s military?

Answer:

We are continuing to examine options to provide training assistance, including International Military Education and Training, to Taiwan. In addition, Taiwan has ongoing Foreign Military Sales cases to support its training. I would defer to DoD on different ongoing initiatives, such as the Joint Training Team, to strengthen and train Taiwan’s military.
Questions for the Record Submitted to
Secretary Antony Blinken by
Representative Michael McCaul #13
House Committee on Foreign Affairs
March 23, 2023

Question: If the Indo-Pacific is the decisive theater, why is Foreign Military Financing for East Asia and the Pacific third in priority, with only 2% of the proposed funding going towards the region?

Answer:

Foreign military financing (FMF) is not the only tool for advancing our defense posture in the Indo-Pacific. The Department continuously reviews all available authorities to bolster support for critical partners in the region. Reducing statutorily directed spending in the appropriation would improve our ability to meet the Indo-Pacific's challenges. Fewer geographic directives or greater authority to deviate from such directives would allow for a more strategic allocation of funds to match specific needs and opportunities, as well as to enable programming to adapt to changing circumstances in the future.
Questions for the Record Submitted to
Secretary Antony Blinken by
Representative Michael McCaul #14
House Committee on Foreign Affairs
March 23, 2023

Question: There is no mention of prioritizing Taiwan in FMF for East Asia and the Pacific. Taiwan is mentioned in Emerging Global Priorities, but it shares this FMF line with East European countries giving their Russian equipment to Ukraine and Tunisia. Why is Taiwan not a priority ask for funding or attention in FMF?

Answer:

We have been clear that our support to Taiwan is rock-solid. Though Taiwan has a high-income economy capable of supporting a multi-billion-dollar defense budget, the FY 2024 budget includes a Foreign Military Financing request of $113 million to address emerging priorities globally, which could include Taiwan. Further, the Department will continue to seek opportunities and creative means to support Taiwan’s defense and deterrence capabilities.
Questions for the Record Submitted to
Secretary Antony Blinken by
Representative Michael McCaul #15
House Committee on Foreign Affairs
March 23, 2023

Question:

Your budget request includes $11.3 billion to “out-compete China”,
including $2 billion for implementation of the Indo-Pacific Strategy,
$2 billion for infrastructure through the Partnership for Global Infrastructure
and Investment, and $7.1 billion for the Compacts of Free Association. How
do each of these programs counter PRC malign influence or increase U.S.
competitiveness against China?

Answer:

The $2 billion for the International Infrastructure Fund aligned with
the Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment will provide
high-quality, strategic “hard” infrastructure projects as credible, reliable
alternatives to the PRC in areas that align with U.S. interests but remain
vulnerable to undue influence from the PRC; the $2 billion for the
Indo-Pacific Strategy will support Indo-Pacific economies to be more
resilient and connected, pushing back against the PRC’s digital
authoritarianism and problematic development model; and the $7.1 billion
for funding related to the Compacts of Free Association, which includes
$6.5 billion in economic assistance and $0.6 billion to support provision of postal services, will provide continued economic assistance to three of our closest partners in the Pacific and maintain our status as the region’s committed partner of choice.
Questions for the Record Submitted to
Secretary Antony Blinken by
Representative Michael McCaul #16
House Committee on Foreign Affairs
March 23, 2023

Question

What is one PGII project in the Indo-Pacific that has demonstrated results in diminishing PRC influence in the region or displaced a PRC-origin project?

Answer

In partnership with Japan and Australia, the United States is supporting Australian firm Telstra’s acquisition of Digicel Pacific’s telecom assets in Papua New Guinea and the Pacific over Chinese competitors. Digicel is the leading telecommunications operator in the Pacific, with over 2.5 million subscribers. Through support from the Development Finance Corporation, Japan Bank for International Cooperation, and Export Finance Australia, Telstra is now able to acquire the assets and finance a “rip and replacement” of an existing Huawei network with trusted vendor technology.
Questions for the Record Submitted to
Secretary Antony Blinken by
Representative Michael McCaul #17
House Committee on Foreign Affairs
March 23, 2023

Question:

What benefits does the U.S. receive from COFA?

Answer:

Our respective Compacts underpin our strategic partnerships with the Freely Associated States (FAS) in support of a free, open, and secure Indo-Pacific, allowing the United States to guard our long-term strategic and defense interests in the region. Under the Compacts, as amended, the United States has full authority and responsibility for defense and security matters in and relating to each of the FAS. Citizens of the FAS also serve in the U.S. Armed Forces, volunteering at per capita rates higher than many U.S. states. The FAS are also reliable partners that support U.S. engagement in the region and U.S. strategic priorities globally.
Questions for the Record Submitted to
Secretary Antony Blinken by
Representative Michael McCaul #18
House Committee on Foreign Affairs
March 23, 2023

Question:
What other assistance programs in the Indo-Pacific require similar levels of funding?

Answer:
In addition to the $7.1 billion ($6.5 billion in economic assistance and $0.6 billion to support provision of postal service) over 20 years to implement amended and extended economic assistance provisions of the Compacts of Free Association, the FY 2024 budget requests $2.1 billion in discretionary for the Indo-Pacific and $2 billion over five years in mandatory funding. This funding would be a game-changing investment in the Indo-Pacific to strengthen partner economies and support their efforts in pushing back against predatory activities. Another $2 billion over five years in mandatory funding for a global international infrastructure fund will support high-quality, strategic “hard” infrastructure projects globally in alignment with the Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment.
Questions for the Record Submitted to
Secretary Antony Blinken by
Representative Michael McCaul #19
House Committee on Foreign Affairs
March 23, 2023

Question:

In your proposed $1.7 million dollar plus-up for the Political-Military Bureau, your budget mentions prioritizing Taiwan’s security policy. How will this money help ensure Taiwan gets the capabilities it needs faster?

Answer:

The extraordinary security environment, particularly in Eastern Europe and the Indo-Pacific, has translated into a quantifiable spike in demands on the security cooperation enterprise. The Political-Military Bureau (PM) is seeking staffing resources to keep pace with those needs, including to address Taiwan’s security. The speed of the arms transfer process is not solely determined by the staffing levels in PM, but these resources would contribute to the bandwidth of the bureau to carry out its mission.
Questions for the Record Submitted to
Secretary Antony Blinken by
Representative Michael McCaul #20
House Committee on Foreign Affairs
March 23, 2023

Question:

What is the Department doing to expedite arms sales to Taiwan?

Answer:

The Department expedites Taiwan arms sales to the greatest extent possible, and we are reviewing our policies and processes to ensure that we facilitate all Foreign Military Sales (FMS) cases, and particularly Taiwan cases, with minimal inefficiencies. Unfortunately, many of the factors negatively affecting delivery times fall outside the U.S. government’s control. In 2022, the Department authorized to Congress 13 Taiwan FMS cases, including 10 new sales, to Congress, which represents the single-highest year number of notifications since at least 1990.
Questions for the Record Submitted to Secretary Antony Blinken by Representative Maria Elvira Salazar #1
House Committee on Foreign Affairs
March 23, 2023

Question:

Lebanon: In December, Sens. Bob Menendez (D-NJ) and Jim Risch (R-ID) 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. 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 combating corruption, and we continue to work with the Department of the Treasury to identify impactful targets.
Questions for the Record Submitted to Secretary Antony Blinken by Representative Maria Elvira Salazar #2
House Committee on Foreign Affairs
March 23, 2023

Question:

Why is the Biden Administration not being firm on the necessary qualifications for Lebanon’s next president?

Answer:

We continue to make clear that Lebanon needs a president free of corruption who can unite the country and forge a coalition to implement needed reforms, like those required to secure an IMF program. I highlighted these qualifications during my meeting with caretaker Prime Minister Najib Mikati and other officials last September, while other senior U.S. officials – including USAID Administrator Power – have done the same in visits to Beirut. Our Ambassador to Lebanon makes these points often, and we highlighted them in a joint statement issued with Saudi Arabia and France in New York in September.
Questions for the Record Submitted to
Secretary Antony Blinken by
Representative Maria Elvira Salazar #3
House Committee on Foreign Affairs
March 23, 2023

Question:

Why are you not stating there will be consequences if Lebanese parliamentarians elect a president who is not clean, capable, and reform-minded?

Answer:

The Biden-Harris Administration continues to stress that Lebanon needs a president free of corruption who can unite the country and forge a coalition to implement badly needed reforms. In concert with our partners in France, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and Egypt, with whom my team met February 6 in Paris, we continue to make clear that Lebanese politicians blocking progress on the election of such a candidate could face negative repercussions – an idea that senior U.S. officials continue to underscore with Lebanese leaders at all levels.
Questions for the Record Submitted to
Secretary Antony Blinken by
Representative Maria Elvira Salazar #4
House Committee on Foreign Affairs
March 23, 2023

Question:

Can you assess our relationship with our European and Gulf partners, particularly France and Saudi Arabia, regarding Lebanon?

Answer:

We continue to work closely with our European and Gulf partners – including France and Saudi Arabia – to press Lebanese officials on the need to expedite presidential elections and implement reforms. Productive engagements to date include a meeting with Saudi Arabia and France on the margins of the UN General Assembly and a February meeting in Paris (which also included Qatar and Egypt) aimed at applying joint pressure on Lebanese officials. We remain in regular contact with our partners on these issues and look forward to future engagements.
Questions for the Record Submitted to
Secretary Antony Blinken by
Representative Maria Elvira Salazar #5
House Committee on Foreign Affairs
March 23, 2023

Question:

Visa Times: Why is the staffing at U.S. Consulates so inadequate that U.S. citizens wait for two years for their foreign spouses to get a visa to join them in the U.S.?

Answer:

Since early 2022, the Department has reduced gaps in consular staffing overseas caused by the drop in fee revenue due to the pandemic’s near-shutdown of international travel. The Department is on track to fill all remaining overseas visa adjudicator positions by the end of this year, and we are creating additional positions at our top immigrant visa (IV) processing posts to be filled in FY 2023 and 2024. In the meantime, we have reduced the global backlog of IV cases awaiting interview scheduling by 27 percent from its July 2021 peak, and backlogs have been eliminated in most countries.
Questions for the Record Submitted to
Secretary Antony Blinken by
Representative Maria Elvira Salazar #6
House Committee on Foreign Affairs
March 23, 2023

Question:

Why is visa processing so uneven that spouses of US citizens wait for years to get their visa at some consulates (like the US Consulate in Ciudad Juarez) while you can get a tourist visa at other consulates within a few weeks?

Answer:

We have largely eliminated immigrant visa scheduling backlogs at all but about a dozen overseas consular sections and significantly reduced nonimmigrant visa interview appointment wait times globally.

By statute and regulation, immigrant visas require a petition to USCIS followed by a thorough visa adjudication process that includes substantial documentary evidence. In contrast, many nonimmigrant visa categories require only the submission of an application, a fee, and an interview.
Questions for the Record Submitted to
Secretary Antony Blinken by
Representative Maria Elvira Salazar #7
House Committee on Foreign Affairs
March 23, 2023

Question:

Will the State Department commit to reporting back to Congress on ways that you have worked to alleviate some of these backlogs like every other agency across the Federal government has done?

Answer:

Since its peak in July 2021, posts have reduced the immigrant visa (IV) backlog by 27 percent. The Department regularly briefs individual members and groups of staff and stands ready to update Congress on IV interview backlog reduction and elimination efforts. Our National Visa Center reports monthly on the interview-ready IV scheduling backlog, which identifies the number of applicants awaiting scheduling at a post abroad. The NVC is working with posts that have longer queues on efficiencies and expects to further reduce backlogs.
Questions for the Record Submitted to
Secretary Antony Blinken by
Representative Bradley Schneider #1
House Committee on Foreign Affairs
March 23, 2023

Question:

Israel is our critical ally, in fact our most important and best ally, in a very important region of the world. As liberal democracies, we are united by our shared values, mutual interests, and common challenges and threats. President Biden recently spoke with Prime Minister Netanyahu and raised two issues of concern. First, the current security dynamics in the West Bank, steps to stabilize the situation and enhance security for both Israelis and Palestinians, while also maintaining prospects for a realistic two state solution — even if it is not viable at the present time. Second, they discussed the government reforms being moved through the Knesset. Both issues are very important, but I believe the greatest threat to the region, and one of the more significant challenges we face globally, is the increasingly near possibility that Iran will successfully develop or acquire nuclear weapons. Iran is currently enriching to 60 percent and evidence shows that they have even gone to 84 percent. How is stopping the potential acquisition of a nuclear weapon by Iran being prioritized by the U.S. and what steps are we taking to expeditiously convince Iran that we will not allow it to acquire a nuclear weapon? Put another way, how do we demonstrate that the U.S. is deadly serious about preventing a nuclear armed Iran, and that all options — including both diplomacy and military action — are on the table?

Answer:

As the President has made clear, the United States is absolutely committed to never allowing Iran to acquire a nuclear weapon. We believe
diplomacy is the best way to achieve this goal, but President Biden has been clear that we have not removed any option from the table, and regularly review all contingencies in full coordination with Israel and our other partners and allies. There is no greater supporter of Israel’s security than President Biden and the United States.
Questions for the Record Submitted to
Secretary Antony Blinken by
Representative Bradley Schneider #2
House Committee on Foreign Affairs
March 23, 2023

Question:

One of the keys to countering Iran and supporting Israel has been the Abraham Accords. I am proud to co-chair the Abraham Accords Caucus with my friend here on the dais, Congresswoman Wagner, as well as Congressman Trone and Commerce Chair McMorris Rogers. The Abraham Accords Caucus has worked to pass the Israel Relations Normalization Act and the DEFEND Act, which will spur normalization in the region and defend it from Iran. I appreciate the Department’s close collaboration with the Abraham Accords Caucus, especially to Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary Yael Lempert from the Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs for agreeing to brief our staff on implementation of the Israel Relations Normalization Act. I also very much appreciate Deputy Assistant Secretary Carland and his staff for being so communicative and helpful in working with the Caucus. I look forward to being a resource to you and continuing to collaborate to deepen and expand the Accords. How do we best demonstrate our commitment to the Middle East and prioritize State Department focus and resources?

Answer:

We have worked relentlessly to expand and deepen the Abraham Accords and normalization agreements between Israel and Arab states, including through the Negev Forum. In support of those efforts, the President’s FY 2024 budget request includes a MENA Opportunity Fund that will provide resources to support projects and opportunities that emerge
from the Negev Forum’s Working Groups. We welcome Congressional support for these efforts, including advocating for robust participation by our Negev Forum partners and encouraging others to join.
Questions for the Record Submitted to Secretary Antony Blinken by Representative Chris Smith #1
House Committee on Foreign Affairs
March 23, 2023

Question:

In 2009, the State Department entered into a broad-based Cultural Property Agreement (CPA) with the People’s Republic of China (PRC), over strong bipartisan congressional opposition. The China CPA is scheduled to renew in April of this year. Given the determination by both Secretary Antony Blinken and his predecessor Secretary Michael Pompeo that the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has committed “genocide” against the Uyghur people; sought to eliminate Tibet’s cultural heritage – as acknowledged by U.S. Special Coordinator for Tibetan Issues Uzra Zeya; destroyed religious monuments, shrines and cemeteries throughout the PRC; and turned world heritage cities like Kashgar in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region into theme parks, please state why you think renewal of the CPA would be justified, and please list countervailing arguments that you are also considering. Given that one of the justifications for entering into or renewing a CPA is to discourage the looting of cultural property in partner countries, what evidence is there of criminal looting of cultural property in China?

Answer:

The cultural property agreement with the PRC creates U.S. import restrictions on limited categories of archaeological material. The United States utilizes such agreements to, among other reasons, keep the U.S. art market clear of looted materials. The agreement will expire on January 14, 2024, unless extended pursuant to the Cultural Property Implementation
Act (CPIA). The agreement may be extended only if the Department determines conditions set out in the CPIA are met after considering recommendations of the Cultural Property Advisory Committee.
Questions for the Record Submitted to
Secretary Antony Blinken by
Representative Chris Smith #2
House Committee on Foreign Affairs
March 23, 2023

Question:

What impact do you think the extensive use of surveillance technology throughout China has had with regards to the relative paucity of evidence of criminal looting of cultural property?

Answer:

Surveillance technology adds to the extensive evidence of cultural property looting in China. Although it is unevenly spread throughout archaeologically rich areas, it has captured footage of criminal actors involved with looting. To ensure broad evidence of cultural property looting, our Cultural Heritage Center gathers information from diverse sources including interviews with PRC government officials, law enforcement, university faculty, researchers, heritage professionals, and from data from INTERPOL, UNESCO, and the World Customs Organization.
Questions for the Record Submitted to Secretary Antony Blinken by Representative Chris Smith #3
House Committee on Foreign Affairs
March 23, 2023

Question:

Please provide an account of the involvement of the CCP, the People’s Liberation Army and state-owned actors have in selling Asian art – including Chinese, Tibetan, and Uyghur art – in art markets in China and Hong Kong SAR. Please provide measurable indicators, such as the monetary value of such art, the number of pieces of such artwork, and a breakdown of where in the PRC the artwork originated.

Answer:

Since 2018, the total global sales of Chinese art and antiquities is estimated at $6 billion per year. Antiquities from China account for approximately $1.5 billion in annual sales, or 25 percent of the market. The requested measurable indicators are not reported by auction houses, dealers, or buyers. China regulates its internal market for cultural property and prohibits export of cultural relics without a permit. For information about the import of cultural property into the United States, I refer you to U.S. Customs and Border Protection.
Questions for the Record Submitted to
Secretary Antony Blinken by
Representative Chris Smith #4
House Committee on Foreign Affairs
March 23, 2023

Question:

Please list countries that are engaged in civil war or extensive civil conflict with which the State Department has CPAs, including but not limited to Afghanistan, Libya and Yemen.

Answer:

The United States has entered into cultural property agreements with three countries where civil unrest or armed conflict has occurred in recent years: Libya, Mali, and Nigeria. In addition, we imposed import restrictions on categories of archaeological and ethnological material from Iraq, Syria, Afghanistan, and Yemen through unilateral emergency actions, pursuant to the Emergency Protection for Iraqi Cultural Antiquities Act of 2004, the Protect and Preserve International Cultural Property Act of 2016, and section §2603 of the Convention on Cultural Property Implementation Act.
Questions for the Record Submitted to
Secretary Antony Blinken by
Representative Chris Smith #5
House Committee on Foreign Affairs
March 23, 2023

Question:

Please provide a list of cultural property that has been repatriated to these countries. Since the Taliban took over Afghanistan following the United States’ precipitous withdrawal from the country in August 2021, please state whether any cultural property has been repatriated to Afghanistan.

Answer:

The Department of State refers inquiries about the repatriation of cultural property to the Departments of Homeland Security and Justice. The Department of State has not participated in the repatriation of any cultural property to Afghanistan since August 2021. In the event Afghan cultural property subject to import restrictions is seized, law enforcement agencies will consult with the Department of State to determine the appropriate means of safeguarding it until such time as it can be safely repatriated to Afghanistan.
Questions for the Record Submitted to
Secretary Antony Blinken by
Representative Chris Smith #6
House Committee on Foreign Affairs
March 23, 2023

Question:

Please also state, to the extent known, whether any such cultural property has been destroyed by governmental or non-governmental actors, as happened to the Buddha sculptures in Bamiyan.

Answer:

We are not aware of any cultural property repatriated to Afghanistan after August 2021. Law enforcement agencies that carry out repatriations have agreed to consult with the Department to determine appropriate means of safeguarding cultural property until it can be safely returned to countries including Afghanistan.
UNCLASSIFIED

Questions for the Record Submitted to
Secretary Antony Blinken by
Representative Chris Smith #7
House Committee on Foreign Affairs
March 23, 2023

Question:

Last year, as part of the National Defense Authorization Act, Congress required that the State Department, in consultation with the Department of Defense, conduct a feasibility study as to whether opportunities exist for greater collaboration in pursuit of United States National Security interests with the Federal Government of Somalia and Somaliland, to be submitted to Congress no later than June 15, 2023. The legislation further draws a clear distinction between Federal Member States of Somalia and Somaliland. What steps have been taken to meet the June 15, 2023 deadline?

Answer:

The United States is in the process of conducting the feasibility study mandated by the 2023 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA). In addition to regular engagement by the U.S. Embassy Mogadishu with Somali national and sub-national actors on issues related to U.S. national security interests, on April 4, 2023, the Department of State plans to host an interagency discussion to examine the issues identified by the NDAA feasibility study requirement. The relevant conclusions from that discussion will be included in the NDAA mandated report as appropriate.
Questions for the Record Submitted to Secretary Antony Blinken by Representative Chris Smith #8 House Committee on Foreign Affairs March 23, 2023

Question:

Have any military exercises with Somaliland forces taken place or been planned? If so, when?

Answer:

The United States has no current plans for military exercises with Somaliland forces. The United States cancelled the portion of Operation Justified Accord scheduled to take place in Somaliland in February 2023 due to Somaliland’s military operation in the city of Lascanood. The U.S. military previously visited Berbera to survey port and airport facilities and to conduct exchanges with relevant officials.
Questions for the Record Submitted to
Secretary Antony Blinken by
Representative Chris Smith #9
House Committee on Foreign Affairs
March 23, 2023

Question:

Did Department of Defense personnel accompany Chargé d’Affaires Tim Trenkle during his February 23 visit to Hargeisa? If so, what was discussed?

Answer:

No Department of Defense personnel accompanied Charge d’Affaires Trenkle during his February 23, 2023, visit to Hargeisa.
Questions for the Record Submitted to
Secretary Antony Blinken by
Representative Chris Smith #10
House Committee on Foreign Affairs
March 23, 2023

Question:

With regard to conflict in Las Anod, please provide a timeline of significant events beginning on July 1, 2022, to the present. Please include a breakdown of the clans which traveled to Las Anod to take part in a consultation among greater Darod clan families, where they are from, and whether clan elders who attended were accompanied by armed entourages of supporters.

Answer:

On December 26, 2022, protests erupted following the killing of an opposition politician by unidentified gunmen. Somaliland forces responded with live ammunition. Demonstrations escalated January 3, following the killing of an influential businessman’s bodyguard by police. On February 6, 2022, Somaliland forces shelled Lascanood after a Dhulbahante elders declaration that Sool, Sanaag, and Cayn should be part of Somalia. There are reports that the Darod subclans of Dhulbahante, Harti, and Majertain have flocked to the area since the violence began.
Questions for the Record Submitted to
Secretary Antony Blinken by
Representative Chris Smith #11
House Committee on Foreign Affairs
March 23, 2023

Question:

With respect to clans which traveled to Las Anod, are you aware of any which received funding or other support from the PRC? Please focus in particular on clans from Puntland, such as the Majeer teen.

Answer:

I am unaware of any PRC role in the violence in Lascanood, including funding provided to clans from Puntland or elsewhere.
Questions for the Record Submitted to
Secretary Antony Blinken by
Representative Chris Smith #12
House Committee on Foreign Affairs
March 23, 2023

Question:

In light of PRC Foreign Minister Wang Yi’s January 2022 visit to Eritrea, where he expressed interest in the nation’s port facilities in Massawa and Assab; his tour of port facilities in Mombasa, Kenya; and China’s military presence in Djibouti, have State Department and Department of Defense visited Berbera as part of their feasibility review? Please provide details as to when this took place, who participated, and what was discussed, including any assessment of the PRC’s maritime interests in the region. (For this response, and any others, please include any classified information in a separate classified annex.)

Answer:

State and Defense Department officials have visited the Berbera port and airport to assess potential operating locations to prepare for contingencies, exercise readiness, or adjust force posture as needed. Ambassador Andre and then-AFRICOM Commander General Townsend visited Hargeisa and Berbera in May 2022. They met with President Bihi and other senior Somaliland government officials. AFRICOM officials conducted site surveys of Berbera on July 28, 2022, and on January 13, 2023. They met with Somaliland security forces and port authorities.