

Administration of Joseph R. Biden, Jr., 2025

Remarks on United States Foreign Policy at the Department of State
January 13, 2025

Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken. Good afternoon. If I didn't say anything, this would go on all afternoon—*[laughter]*—for good reason.

Mr. President, it is an honor to welcome you back to the State Department.

On day one of this administration, you shared a few things with me. You told me something that we long discussed, reminded me that American engagement, American leadership is essential.

If we're not engaged, if we're not leading, you said, someone else is likely to be doing it and probably not in a way that advances our interests or values. Or maybe no one's doing it, and then we're likely to have a vacuum filled with bad things before it's filled with good things.

But the other thing you told me, Mr. President, was that there's a greater premium than ever before on finding ways to cooperate, to coordinate, to work with other countries if we're going to get done what we need to get done for the American people.

And so you instructed me, you instructed all of us to get out there, to rebuild, to rejuvenate, even to reimagine our alliances and partnerships.

And I remember what you told me then. You said, "We don't know when this is going to make a difference, when we're going to need these friendships, these partnerships, but someday, some way, somewhere, they're going to be critical for advancing the national interest." And that's exactly what the men and women of this Department have done, and we've been able to carry out that charge for two reasons.

First, the people you see before you and so many others who are out in the field or Embassies and consulates, you said when you came here 4 years ago that the leadership of diplomats of every stripe doing the daily work of Government is essential. And they proved it.

That daily work has become nightly work—*[laughter]*—24/7, 7 days a week—hammering out agreements, jumping into action in crisis, creating opportunities for our citizens around the world, producing expert advice for you and your team at the White House.

Everyone here knows this work can be tough, it's often not very glamorous, but it makes us stronger. It makes the world a better place.

And we simply couldn't do it without the extraordinary men and women that you have before us, as well as our remarkable partners in Government, starting with the great White House team led by Jake Sullivan, my friends and colleagues from across the administration: the Secretary of Defense, Samantha Power at USAID, the Secretary of the Treasury, Commerce, and so on. All of these partnerships that we've built and built with their teams have made a difference.

So, to all of my colleagues, thank you. Thank you for your friendship. Thank you for your partnership.

There's one other reason that we've been able to reengage and rejuvenate our diplomacy. And, Mr. President, that's you. You have never wavered in the conviction that when America leads, when America engages, there is little we cannot accomplish and that this country remains a force for good, a force for progress around the world.

Your unshakable belief in the promise of America has inspired me for more than 20 years. It's inspired so many people in this Department and around the world. Simply put, it's been the privilege of my lifetime to work for you, to work with you, to work with this extraordinary team that you've assembled.

And it's the honor of a lifetime to be able to introduce, one more time, the 46th President the United States, Joe Biden.

The President. Thank you. Thank you, thank you, thank you. [Applause] Thank you. Thank you, thank you. Please. Thank you.

Thank you, thank you, thank you.

It's good to be back at the State Department.

Tony, if I may start by saying this, you're one of the finest men I've ever known in any undertaking for one important reason: You have—[applause]. You're not only brilliant, you have incredible character. You have character. You have more integrity than almost anybody I know. Thank you for always sticking with me. Appreciate it.

Folks, I'm grateful for his counsel and his friendship as well, but I also want to thank the members of my Cabinet and the Members of the Congress who are today. And to all—all—our diplomats and development experts, servicemembers, and intelligence professionals: Many of the achievements we're going to discuss today were—are the result of your hard work. And that's not hyperbole. It's true. Thank you, thank you, thank you, thank you for your extraordinary service.

You know, I come here to the State Department to report on the American—to the American people on the progress we've made in the last 4 years in our foreign policy and in our Presidency.

I've said many times: We're at an inflection point. The post-cold war period is over. A new era has begun. In these 4 years, we faced crises that—and we've been tested. We've come through those tests stronger, in my view, than we entered those tests. This is a fierce competition underway: the future of the global economy, technology, human values, and so much else.

Right now, in my view, thanks to our administration, the United States is winning the worldwide competition. Compared to 4 years ago, America is stronger, our alliances are stronger, our adversaries and competitors are weaker, and we have not gone to war to make these things happen.

During my Presidency, I've increased America's power in every dimension. We've increased our diplomatic power, creating more allies the United States has ever had in the history of our Nation. We've increased our military power, making the most significant investments in the defense industrial base in decades.

We've increased the technology power, taking the lead on artificial intelligence and other technologies of the future. And we've increased the economic power, building the most dynamic economy in the world from the bottom up and the middle out, not the top down.

In short, when Kamala and I took office, our Nation had become stronger at home—are stronger in the world. And now America is more capable and, I would argue, better prepared than we've been in a long, long time. While our competitors and adversaries are facing stiff headwinds, we have the wind at our back because of all of you.

This is what we're heading into. And over to the next administration, that's what we're handing it to. Today I want to lay out what we've done and the opportunities we've created for America and those opportunities going forward.

Today I can report to the American people: Our sources of national power are far stronger than they were when we took office. Our economy is booming, although there is more work to do. Our technologies, from artificial intelligence to biotech, quantum, and—to advanced semiconductors, they're the envy of the world.

And we have made the most significant investments in America and the American workers since the New Deal to rebuild our roads and bridges, our ports and airports, clean water systems, affordable high-speed internet, and so much more; to build American manufacturing; to make advanced semiconductors—which we invented—here at home. And we made the largest investment in climate and clean energy ever, anywhere on Earth in the history of the world, spurring nearly \$500 billion in private-sector investment.

We've also significantly strengthened the defense industrial base, investing almost \$1.3 trillion in procurement and research and development. In real dollars, that's more than America did in any 4-year period during the cold war. This is going to ensure that we're fully equipped to fight and win wars, which is also the best way to deter wars in the first place.

Today I can report to the American people: Our alliances are stronger than they've been in decades. NATO is more capable than it's ever been. And many more of our allies are paying their fair share. Before I took office, nine NATO allies were spending 2 percent of their GDP on defense. Now 23 are spending 2 percent.

And look at the Indo-Pacific. We've made partnerships stronger and created new partnerships to challenge China's aggressive behavior and to rebalance power in the region. We did it—what few thought was possible: to build the first-ever trilateral partnership between the United States, Japan, and South Korea and then another among the United States, Japan, and the Philippines, drawing closer our Pacific allies to defend our shared security and prosperity.

We brokered a defense pact known as AUKUS among the United States, Australia, and the United Kingdom, connecting the Atlantic and Pacific allies as only America is able to do.

And we've taken the Quad to the next level. The United States, Japan, Australia—Australia, and India. When we were—had that first meeting, I was dumbfounded when they all called and said, "Can we do this at your house?" [*Laughter*] You think I'm kidding. [*Laughter*] My wife said, "No problem." [*Laughter*]

It was during the U.N. meeting, and we thought we were going to do it in New York, but they wanted to do it in Delaware. I said, "Why?" They said, "We can know—then people will know we're really friends." [*Laughter*]

Our democracies, with vibrant economies, working closely—security, supply chains, technology, and so much more.

In the Red Sea, we brought together more than 20 countries for—[*inaudible*]*—civilian—to protect civilian ships from attack by the Houthis, defending freedom of navigation in one of the world's busiest waterways.*

And we have strengthened partnerships all across the Americas, defending democracy, targeting corruption, addressing migration, increasing prosperity, and protecting Amazon rainforest, which captures billions of tons—billions of tons—of carbon from the atmosphere every year.

Overall, we've reinvigorated people's faith in the United States as a true, true partner.

Today I can report to the American people: Our adversaries are weaker than they were when we came into this job 4 years ago. Just consider Russia. When Putin invaded Ukraine, he thought he'd conquer Kyiv in a matter of days. But the truth is: Since that war began, I'm the only one

that's stood in the center of Kyiv, not him. Putin never has. [Applause] Think about it. It was a long train ride, but I'm the only Commander in Chief to visit a war zone not controlled by U.S. forces. [Laughter] We helped the Ukrainians stop Putin.

And now, nearly 3 years later, Putin has failed to achieve any of his strategic objectives. He has failed thus far to subjugate Ukraine, failed to break the unity of NATO, and failed to make large territorial gains.

But there's more to do. We can't walk away. We rallied 50 nations to stand with Ukraine. Not just in Europe, but the first—for the first time in Asia as well, because those countries in Asia know what happens in Ukraine matters to them as well.

We delivered air interceptors, massive numbers of munitions; enacted relentless, unprecedented sanctions to keep Ukraine in the fight. And now Russia is struggling to replace what they are losing on the battlefield in terms of military equipment and fighters, and the ruble is under enormous pressure.

As I saw it, when Putin launched his invasion, I had two jobs: one, to rally the world to defend Ukraine, and the other is to avoid war between two nuclear powers. We did both those things. And today, Ukraine is still free, independent country with the potential—the potential—for a bright future. And we laid the foundation for the next administration so they can protect the bright future of the Ukrainian people.

And now look at Iran. Did you ever think we would be where we are with Iran at this moment? After those despicable attacks by Hamas on October the 7th, Iran directly attacked Israel twice with hundreds of ballistic missiles and drones. And twice they failed because the United States organized a coalition of countries to stop them and ordered U.S. aircraft to come to the defense of Israel.

Now Iran's air defenses are in shambles. Their main proxy, Hizballah, is badly wounded. And as we tested Iran's willingness to revive the nuclear deal, we kept the pressure with sanctions. Now Iran's economy is in desperate straits. All told, Iran is weaker than it's been in decades.

And if you want more evidence that we've seriously weakened Iran and Russia, just take a look at Syria. President Assad was both countries' closest ally in the Middle East. Neither—neither—could keep him in power. Quite frankly, neither really tried very hard.

Now, I cannot claim credit for every factor that led to Iran and Russia growing weaker in the past 4 years. They did plenty of damage all by themselves. But Israel did plenty of damage to Iran and its proxies. But there's no question our actions contributed significantly.

And now major authoritarian states are aligning more closely with one another: Iran, Russia, China, North Korea. But that's more out of weakness than out of strength. So, as the new administration begins, the United States is in a fundamentally stronger position with respect to these countries than we were 4 years ago.

Today I can report to the American people: We're in a better strategic position in the long-term competition with China than we were when I took office. You all recall, many experts believed or were predicting it was inevitable that China's economy would surpass ours. According to many predictions, that would happen by the year 2030 or shortly thereafter.

But we in this room said: "No. If we make the investments in ourselves, if we protect our workers and technologies, that will not happen." Now, according to the latest predictions on China's current course, they will never surpass us. Period.

I met one on one with President Xi in consequential summits. He and I have always been direct and straightforward with each other. I made it clear we expect China and everyone to abide by the international rules. And so we stood up against unfair trade practices, taking action when China dumped subsidized goods—incredibly subsidized—on our markets to undercut our workers.

We imposed target tariffs on critical sectors like cars, steel, and semiconductors, rather than across-the-board tariffs. We imposed historic export controls on investments and restrictions to ensure that China cannot—cannot—use the most advanced technology and sensitive data against us.

And critically, we enlisted our allies and partners to join us, building more convergence among our allies on a shared approach to China than ever existed and showing that it's more effective to deal with China alongside of partners, rather than going it alone.

But even while we compete vigorously, we've managed our relationship with China responsibly so it's never tipped over into conflict. We've created lines of communication between President Xi and myself and between the leaders of our militaries to avoid misunderstanding.

We found ways to work with each other to address climate change, to reduce the flow of fentanyl into the United States—which, by the way, overdose deaths are coming down across our Nation. And, in my administration, we've seized more fentanyl at our border in 2 years than the previous 5 years combined.

Today I can also report to the American people: We're [I'm; White House correction] the first President in decades who is not leaving a war in Afghanistan to his successor. When we got bin Laden during the Obama-Biden administration, the primary objective of war had been accomplished, and I believed that going forward, the primary threat of Al Qaida would no longer be emanating from Afghanistan, but from elsewhere and so we did not need to station sizable number of American forces in Afghanistan.

So, when I took office, I had a choice. Ultimately, I saw no reason to keep thousands of servicemen in Afghanistan. I think I had my schedule with me, and I keep it on my—I don't here. I don't have it—but I keep it on the back of my card, the actual number of dead and wounded that occurred in our longest war, to remind myself. Keep spending hundreds of millions of dollars a day. We're now [no; White House correction] longer doing that.

In my view, it was time to end the war and bring our troops home, and we did.

I commend the courage of all those who served in Afghanistan. We grieve all 2,461 Americans who made the ultimate sacrifice in the longest war in American history. And I grieve those brave servicemembers whose lives were lost during the withdrawal.

We also thank those inside and outside our Government who have done so much to help thousands of Afghan families resettle in the United States.

Remember, critics said if we ended the war, it would damage our alliances, and it would create threats to our homeland from foreign-directed terrorism out of a safe haven in Afghanistan. Neither has occurred. Neither has occurred. And our alliances have stayed strong.

We've used our over-the-horizon capabilities to strike in Afghanistan and elsewhere when we had to—for instance, eliminating Zawahiri, the leader of Al Qaida, who helped orchestrate the September 11 attacks. And we did it without putting more American boots on the ground.

And by ending the war, we've been able to focus our energy and resources on more urgent challenges. There is nothing—and I can tell you from my conversations with both Xi and Putin—

nothing our adversaries and competitors, like Russia and China, would have liked more than seeing us continue to be tied down in Afghanistan for another decade.

For all those reasons, ending the war was the right thing to do, and I believe history will reflect that.

And, from the moment I entered office, I also worked to free as many Americans as possible being held hostage or wrongfully detained overseas. We brought home more than 75 Americans, by last count. And, in some cases, it took months, even years, of effort, like the prisoner swap with Russia over the past summer, a feat of diplomacy involving all—many of you and involving multiple countries who joined complex negotiations at our request—another example of the power of our alliances. If we did not have these relationships, those women and women [men; White House correction] would likely still be in prison.

And finally, I can report to the American people that we've restored our leadership on a range of other generational priorities. When I took office, we were no longer part of the international climate agreement. We announced on day one that rejoin—we would join the Paris accord—rejoin.

And we've led by example; we've conserved hundreds of millions of acres—hundreds of millions of acres—of land and water, more than any President in American history; making investments in clean energy and convincing other nations to join us.

Thanks to our efforts, the world has reached the goal of investing \$100 billion every year in public and private funds to reduce greenhouse emissions, to drive down the cost of clean energy, to help developing nations adapt to climate change.

Our administration has launched a transformative initiative to build high-impact infrastructure in developing nations. It's called PGI. You all know that better than anyone. This is our alternative to what China offers with its massive projects across Africa and beyond. But their approach features no workers' rights, no environmental protections, unmanageable debt, shoddy construction, all in exchange for military access to ports and other exploitative purposes.

By contrast, we've leveraged \$600 billion and unleashed the private sector to build an infrastructure in order to grow economies and combat climate change. As an example, I was recently in Angola to see a major project being built with the help of American public funding, which brought in even more private investment.

We're building the first-ever transcontinental railroad across Africa that will significantly improve the economies of the region, will help farmers transport crops to new global markets, will transport critical minerals that would—that need—that are needed for electric vehicles and semiconductors. China used to control the supply chains and these materials, but not for long.

Now, make no mistake: There are serious challenges that the United States must continue to deal with in Ukraine, in the Middle East, in the Indo-Pacific. We must keep the pressure on the Houthis, who are attacking ships in the Red Sea, launching missiles at Israel, and firing at American forces. We must deter North Korea as they rattle their saber and draw closer to Russia. And new challenges will certainly emerge in the months and years ahead.

But even—but even so, it's clear: My administration is leaving the next administration with a very strong hand to play. And we're leaving them an America with more friends and stronger alliances, whose adversaries are weaker and under pressure; an America that once again is leading, uniting countries, setting the agenda, bringing others together behind our plans and visions; an America which is no longer at war, which has made historic investments in American workers, American energies, American factories, generating the strongest economy in the world, which is now in a much better position to win the future against any competitor.

These wins are not partisan. They're American. They benefit all Americans and reflect America's endless capacity for leadership and reinvention.

Look, folks, the United States should take full advantage of our diplomatic and geopolitical opportunities we've created to keep bringing countries together to deal with challenges posed by China, to make sure Putin war—Putin's war ends in a just and lasting peace for Ukraine, and to capitalize on a new moment for a more stable, integrated Middle East.

To do that, the next administration must make sure the fall of Assad does not lead to the resurgence of ISIS in Syria and across the region. It must carry forward the commitment that America will never, never allow Iran to acquire a nuclear weapon.

And, on the war between Israel and Hamas, we're on the brink of a proposal that I laid out in detail months ago finally coming to fruition. I have learned in many years of public service to never, never, never, ever give up.

So I spoke to Prime Minister of Israel yesterday. I spoke to the Amir of Qatar today. I look forward to speaking with President Sisi soon. We're pressing hard to close this.

The deal we have structured would free the hostages, halt the fighting, provide security to Israel, and allow us to significantly surge humanitarian assistance to the Palestinians, who have suffered terribly in this war that Hamas started. They've been through hell. So many innocent people have been killed. So many communities have been destroyed.

The Palestinian people deserve peace and the right to determine their own futures. Israel deserves peace and real security. And the hostages and their families deserve to be reunited. And so we're working urgently to close this deal.

And, as we deal with immediate challenges, in my view, we have to look to the future. I urge the next administration to carry forward two issues that have been central to my Presidency and which shape the future, in my view.

On artificial intelligence, we are in the lead, and we must stay in the lead. We must not offshore artificial intelligence, as we once did with computer chips and other critical technologies. AI has the power to reshape economies, governments, national security, entire societies. And it must be the United States and our closest allies that lead the way to ensure people's rights are respected, their safety is protected, and their data is secure.

And likewise, the clean energy transition will race ahead in the years to come. I know in some incoming administration—some in the incoming administration are skeptical about the need for clean energy. They don't even believe climate change is real. I think they come from a different century.

They're wrong. They are dead wrong. It's the single greatest existential threat to humanity. And the clean energy transition is already happening.

China is trying to dominate the clean energy, manufacturing critical minerals, supply chains. They want to capture the market of the future and create new dependencies. The United States must win that contest, and we will shape the global economy and the planet for decades to come.

Let me close with this. Like many of you, I've dedicated a significant portion of my career to our Nation's foreign policy, as chair of the Foreign Relations Committee as a Senator, as Vice President for 8 years, and now President of the United States. I put together one of the most competent foreign policy teams, I would argue, in American history, sitting in this room and before my eyes.

Throughout my career, the world has gone—undergone tremendous change. But certain things have always held true. At our best, America leads not only by the example of our power, but the power of our example.

In the past 4 years, we've used that power not to go it alone, but instead, to bring countries together, to increase shared security and prosperity, to stand up to aggression, and to solve problems through diplomacy wherever possible; and to relentlessly defend democracy, civil rights, and human rights, because that's who we are. That's who we are.

You've heard me say it many times before. We're the only country on Earth founded on an idea. Every other country is founded on geography, religion, ethnicity, or some other unifying factor. But America was built on an idea—on an idea—literally, not figuratively. That idea was all women and men are created equal, the idea that has inspired the world for 250 years and counting.

We're always reaching to do better, always looking to the future, and, at our best, always seeking progress for our people and for people everywhere.

It's been the honor of my life to serve as your President. And today I'm optimistic about our future, as optimistic as I've ever been.

We just have to remember who in the hell we are. You've heard me say it many times. We're the United States of America, for God's sake. There is nothing, nothing, nothing beyond our capacity if we do it together and commit to it—nothing.

So thank you all for all you've done. I hope many of you are going to be staying in the next administration to keep this moving. May God bless you all, and may God protect our troops.

Thank you, thank you, thank you. Thank you, from the bottom of my heart. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at approximately 2:30 p.m. in the Benjamin Franklin Room. In his remarks, he referred to Vice President Kamala D. Harris; President Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin of Russia; Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel; Amir Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani of Qatar; and President Abdelfattah Said Elsisi of Egypt. He also referred to the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) terrorist organization. Secretary Blinken referred to National Security Adviser Jacob J. Sullivan; and U.S. Agency for International Development Administrator Samantha Power. The transcript was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on January 15.

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developing countries; Infrastructure improvements; Iran, missile and drone attacks on Israel; Iran, nuclear weapons development; Iran, regional involvement; Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) terrorist organization; Israel, attacks by Hamas of October 7, 2023; Israel, Iranian missile and drone attacks; Israel, military operations in Gaza; Israel, Prime Minister; Land and maritime conservation efforts; Lebanon, Hizballah political-paramilitary organization; Manufacturing industry, domestic investment; North Atlantic Treaty Organization; Opioid epidemic, efforts to combat; Paris Agreement on climate change; Qatar, Amir; Quadrilateral Security Dialogue; Rail infrastructure, improvement efforts; Red Sea attacks on commercial shipping; Research and development; Russia, conflict in Ukraine; Russia, President; Russia, U.S. and international sanctions; Secretary of State; Semiconductor manufacturing; Syria, ouster of President Bashar al-Asad; U.S. diplomatic efforts, expansion; Ukraine, international military aid; Ukraine, Russian invasion and airstrikes; Vice President; Yemen, Houthi militant organization.

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