

Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken
Review of the FY 2023 State Department Budget Request
House Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs
Thursday, April 28, 2022

Chairwoman Lee, Ranking Member Rogers, I'm grateful for the opportunity to speak with you about the Administration's proposed budget for the State Department.

I just returned from Kyiv, where Secretary of Defense Austin and I demonstrated the United States' stalwart commitment to the government and people of Ukraine.

Moscow's brutal war of aggression against Ukraine has brought into sharp focus the power and purpose of American diplomacy, and why it's more crucial than ever to our national security and the interests of the American people. Our diplomacy is rallying allies and partners around the world to join us in supporting Ukraine with security, economic, and humanitarian assistance, imposing greater costs on the Kremlin, strengthening our collective security and defense, and addressing the war's mounting global consequences, including the refugee and food crises.

President Putin's war of choice has achieved the exact opposite of his objectives. Uniting, rather than dividing, Ukrainians. Strengthening, rather than weakening, NATO and the U.S.-EU partnership. Undercutting, rather than asserting, the Kremlin's claims of military might. And that's not only because of Ukraine's bravery and resilience. It's also because of effective U.S. diplomacy.

We must continue to drive that diplomacy forward to seize to the strategic opportunities and address risks presented by Russia's overreach, as countries reconsider their policies, priorities, and relationships. The budget request before you predated this crisis, but fully funding it is critical to ensuring Russia's war in Ukraine is a strategic failure for the Kremlin and serves as a powerful lesson to those who might consider following its path.

As we focus on this urgent crisis, the State Department continues to carry out the missions traditionally associated with diplomacy, like responsibly managing great power competition with China, facilitating a halt to fighting in Yemen and Ethiopia, and pushing back against the rising tide of authoritarianism and the threat it poses to human rights.

We also face evolving challenges that require us to develop new capabilities, such as the emergence and reemergence of infectious diseases, an accelerating climate crisis, and a digital revolution that holds both enormous promise and peril.

Last fall, I set out a modernization agenda for the State Department and U.S. diplomacy to respond to these complex demands, built on five pillars. Deepening our expertise in areas that are critical to the future of America's national security. Continuing to attract, retain, and develop the world's best diplomats. Fostering greater innovation and feedback. Modernizing our technology, communications, and analytical capabilities. And reinvigorating in-person diplomacy and public engagement – to get our diplomats beyond embassy walls and engage the people we need to reach most.

In no small part thanks to the significant FY22 budget approved by Congress, we've been able to make real progress on this agenda, though much remains to be done.

To give just a few examples, we've strengthened our capacity to shape the ongoing technological revolution, so it protects our interests, boosts our competitiveness, and upholds our values. With bipartisan Congressional support and encouragement, we recently launched a new bureau for cyberspace and digital policy, with 60 team members to start.

We're also making headway on ensuring our diplomats reflect America's remarkable diversity, which is one of our nation's greatest strengths. Our Department's first ever Chief Diversity and Inclusion Officer, Ambassador Gina Abercrombie-Winstanley, has spearheaded an effort to analyze the obstacles that prevent underrepresented groups from joining and advancing at State, and will soon release a four-year strategic plan to tackle these problems. We've expanded the Pickering and Rangel fellowship programs, and created, for the first time, paid internships at State, also with strong Congressional input and support.

These efforts are showing results. We recently welcomed a new cohort of 179 exceptional Foreign Service professionals, putting the Department on track for its largest annual intake in a decade.

My first 15 months in this job have only strengthened my conviction that these and other reforms are not just worthwhile, but essential to delivering for the American people.

Today's meeting marks the 100th time I've briefed Congress in meetings or calls, which is one of the ways I've worked to meet the commitment I made in my confirmation hearing to restore Congress's role as a partner both in our foreign policymaking and in revitalizing the State Department. These engagements have also helped further refine and strengthen our modernization agenda.

Ensuring we can deliver on that agenda will require sustained funding, new authorities, and most importantly, partnership from Congress. That's why I was grateful for the Chairman and Ranking Member's request to reestablish a formal dialogue on the State Department Authorization, a request we've delivered on. Last month, we sent your staff the first package of legislative authorities required to meet the complex challenges we face, and we expect to send another in the coming weeks.

If we want to deepen our capability in key areas like climate, pandemic preparedness, and multilateral diplomacy; expand on Secretary Powell's vision of a foreign service training float; and equip our workforce with the training, tools, and technology that today's challenges demand – we need additional resources.

If we want to be able to swiftly stand up new missions... deploy diplomats when and where they're needed... and make those decisions based on risk management rather than risk aversion – we need to reform the Secure Embassy Construction and Counterterrorism Act and Accountability Review Board statute to enable greater flexibility, while meeting important security standards.

If we want to rapidly scale up in response to crises like refugee surges and epidemics, while also avoiding costly overhead, we need more flexible domestic hiring authorities.

This is not about advancing the goals of any one administration or party. It's about refocusing our mission and purpose on the forces that will affect Americans' lives, livelihoods, and security for decades to come.

So I appreciate the opportunity to speak today about why this matters, and look forward to continuing to make this committee, and Congress as a whole, a partner in these efforts.

Thank you.