

Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken
Opening Statement
House Foreign Affairs Committee
Wednesday, March 10, 2021

Chairman Meeks, Ranking Member McCaul, thank you very much. And to the members of the Committee, thank you for having me here to talk about the foreign policy of the Biden-Harris Administration, our goals and priorities, and the early work we've done to achieve them.

I've enjoyed engaging with many of you as we work together on these goals. As I've said before, I'm committed to working with Congress – on the take-off, not just the landing – because you represent the will of the people, and our foreign policy is stronger when the American people support it. And I hope that the Administration's recommitment to working with you will usher in a new era of trust, cooperation, and understanding between the executive and legislative branches. Our country is stronger when we can collaborate on issues as important as these.

As I'll describe today, the Biden-Harris Administration set our foreign policy priorities by asking a few simple questions: What will this policy mean for American workers and their families? What do we need to do around the world to make us stronger at home? And what do we need to do at home to make us stronger in the world?

With those questions in mind, here are eight of our top priorities.

First, stopping COVID-19 and strengthening global health security. We want to end the pandemic that has defined our lives for more than a year, which will take intense global coordination. We also need to learn the right lessons and make the right investments in global health security – including human resources and tools to predict, prevent, and stop pandemics, and a firm global commitment to share accurate and timely information – so a crisis like this never happens again.

Second, building a more stable, inclusive global economy. The pandemic caused nearly every country on Earth to have a recession last year. It also laid bare inequalities that have defined life for millions of Americans for a long time. So we have a double challenge: to protect Americans from a lengthy downturn now and to make sure the global economy delivers security and opportunity for as many Americans as possible in the long term.

Third, renewing democracy at home and abroad. Strong democracies are more stable, more open, better partners to us, more committed to human rights, less prone to conflict, and more dependable markets for our goods and services. So supporting democracy around the world is a foreign policy imperative. That's also the case for shoring up our own democracy. Otherwise, we play right into the hands of adversaries and competitors like Russia and China, who seize every opportunity to sow doubts about the strength of our system and our country.

Fourth, working to create a humane and effective immigration system. Strong borders are fundamental to our national security, and laws are the bedrock of our democracy. But we also need a diplomatic – and just plain decent – solution to the fact that, year after year, people from other countries risk everything to try to make it here. And we need to get back to that core piece of our identity as a nation that is generous toward refugees and asylum-seekers, and that welcomes immigrants into our communities. This is also key to our national economic competitiveness, including in science and technology, medicine and health, and other key fields where immigrants often represent top talent.

Fifth, revitalizing our ties with our allies and partners. Our alliances are “force multipliers” and our unique asset. We’re making a big push to reconnect with our friends and allies – and to reinvent partnerships built years ago, so they’re suited to today’s challenges. We are clear that real partnership means carrying burdens together – everyone doing their part, not just us.

Sixth, tackling the climate crisis and driving a clean energy revolution. The climate crisis is one of the most daunting ever to face humanity. It is the definition of a problem that we need to work together – as a community of nations – to solve. To limit us to a temperature rise of 1.5 degrees, which is in line with our targets under the Paris Agreement, a global transformation of the energy sector is essential. That will require us to develop and deploy a full range of clean energy technologies to reach net zero emissions by the middle of the century. We must also provide a just and inclusive energy transition, so that everyone, no matter their income or where they live, can participate in the promise of prosperity brought about by clean energy innovation. Historically, the United States has been the engine of global energy innovation. It’s vital that we revitalize American leadership in this field.

Seventh, securing our leadership in technology. We want America to maintain our scientific and technological edge, because it’s critical to us thriving in the 21st century economy. The United States is a world leader in creating the technology innovations and solutions that make the lives of people around the world better. At the same time, we need to make sure new technologies protect our privacy, create rather than eliminate high-quality jobs, make the world safer, and make democracies more resilient. We will bring countries aligned with democratic principles together to shape behavior around emerging technologies and establish guardrails against misuse – while strengthening our tech defenses and deterrents. We need only look at SolarWinds – the major hack of U.S. government networks last year – to see how determined our adversaries are to use technology to undermine us.

And eighth, managing the biggest geopolitical test of the 21st century: our relationship with China. China is the only country with the economic, diplomatic, military, and technological power to seriously challenge the stable and open international system – all the rules, values, and relationships that make the world work the way we want it to, because it ultimately serves the interests and reflects the values of the American people. Our relationship with China will be competitive when it should be, collaborative when it can be, and adversarial when it must be. The common denominator is the need to engage China from a position of strength.

With those priorities in mind, here are some of the foreign policy actions we’ve taken to date in the first 50 days of the Biden-Harris Administration.

- **On COVID-19:** we reengaged the World Health Organization and contributed an initial \$2 billion to COVAX, the global vaccination initiative. Because none of us will be fully safe until the majority of the world is immune, because as long as the virus is replicating, it could mutate into new strains that find their way to America.
- **On climate:** we rejoined the Paris Agreement, announced the Climate Leaders Summit, which will be held on Earth Day, April 22nd, and are rapidly reestablishing our role as a clean energy and innovation leader in multilateral forums.
- **On our allies and partners:** We held the first ministerial meeting of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, between us, Japan, Australia, and India, an increasingly vital forum for security in the Indo-Pacific, and we will hold a leader-level summit of the Quad on Friday. We halted any planned troop withdrawals from Germany pending a Global Posture Review, led by the Pentagon. I took my first “virtual trip” as Secretary to Canada and Mexico, who are not only our neighbors but our vital partners. And next week, Secretary Austin and I will travel to Japan and South Korea for a 2+2 meeting with our allies.
- **On immigration:** we overturned the discriminatory Muslim and Africa travel bans. We rescinded the “zero tolerance” Executive Order on migrant family separation. And we sent the U.S. Citizenship Act of 2021 to the Hill to modernize our immigration system.
- **On refugee and asylum policies:** we rescinded harmful executive orders on refugee resettlement and announced a new refugee admissions target of 125,000 people for fiscal year 2022. We suspended the Asylum Cooperative Agreements with the governments of El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras. And we reinstated Deferred Enforced Departure to Liberians and granted temporary protected status to Venezuelans already in the U.S.
- **On democracy and human rights:** we joined the UN Human Rights Council as an Observer. We put into effect the Presidential Proclamation that U.S. diplomacy promote and protect the human rights of LGBTQI+ people worldwide. We released the Khashoggi report and announced the “Khashoggi Ban” to stop people who engaged in serious, extraterritorial counter-dissident activities on behalf of a foreign government from entering the U.S. We imposed Russia sanctions over Alexei Navalny’s poisoning and detention. And we imposed sanctions in response to the military coup in Burma.
- **On public health:** we rescinded the Mexico City Policy, prioritizing sexual and reproductive health, including funding for the UN Population Fund.
- **On nonproliferation:** we extended the New START Treaty with Russia for five years and relaunched diplomacy with our closest European allies to bring Iran back into compliance with the JCPOA.
- **On conflict diplomacy,** we suspended the sale of offensive weapons to Saudi Arabia and named a Special Envoy to lead diplomatic efforts to end the war in Yemen. We revoked the designations of Houthis as a Foreign Terrorist Organization to enable urgent assistance in the

world's worst humanitarian crisis. And we boosted diplomatic efforts in Afghanistan ahead of the May 1 deadline.

- **And on investing in the State Department itself:** we are committed to making the department even stronger. We're focused not just on policy but also on people. We're investing in diversity and inclusion, because we need a diplomatic workforce that reflects the diversity of the United States – that's a huge diplomatic asset for us. We are focused on accountability and transparency. And more broadly, we will modernize and rebuild the department, so our outstanding team around the world has the tools and support they need to get the job done.

As you can see, many of these steps map onto those eight core priorities I listed at the start. They're all connected to critical global challenges. And we can draw a line from each of these actions and the security, prosperity, and well-being of the American people.

The Biden-Harris Administration aims to use our foreign policy to make progress on short-term problems and address their root causes and lay the groundwork for our long-term strength. As the President says, to not only build back, but build back better.

We will lead with diplomacy, because it's the best way to deal with today's challenges.

And more than any other time in my career, distinctions between “domestic” and “foreign” policy have fallen away. Beating COVID means vaccinating people at home and containing the virus abroad. Winning in the global economy means making the right investments at home and pushing back against unfair trading practices by China and others. Our domestic renewal and our strength in the world are completely entwined. And how we work will reflect that reality.

Above all, we will hold ourselves accountable to a single, overarching measure of success: are we delivering results for the American people?

That's our mission and our opportunity, and we will make the most of it.

Thank you. I'm looking forward to your questions.