



Chairwoman Barbara Lee
Subcommittee on Department of State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs
Hearing: Department of State and Related Programs FY22 Budget Request
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As Prepared

Good morning and welcome to this morning's hearing with Secretary of State Antony Blinken.

Secretary Blinken, our country is fortunate to have your determined, effective, and respected leadership at the helm of the State Department, particularly during this time of tremendous upheaval and discord. Thank you for your service to our country and for being here today.

One of my priorities as Chair is finding new ways to better engage the American public in global affairs—particularly communities and people who have historically felt disconnected and marginalized from foreign policy. This begins with making sure Congress is able to play its full role in foreign policy decision making. In our first conversation after your confirmation as Secretary of State, you expressed your desire to make the State Department more open and accountable to Congress. It is still early in your tenure, but I have been pleased to see clear evidence of your efforts and look forward to working with you more on this effort, which is critical to ensuring that we have a foreign policy that reflects the values and priorities of all Americans.

The tools of diplomacy and foreign assistance have been undervalued and under-resourced for far too long. Today's hearing will provide Members of our Subcommittee a timely opportunity to hear directly from you how diplomacy and foreign assistance can effectively be utilized to respond to the growing challenges around the world. First and foremost is bringing the COVID-19 pandemic to a close, which includes the rapid distribution and administration of vaccines and helping the developing world recover from the pandemic's devastating impact across all sectors. I am particularly eager to hear the latest on the Administration's efforts to make vaccines available in low- and middle-income countries.

One of my top priorities as Chairwoman is eliminating long-standing barriers to diversity that exist in our foreign affairs workforce and that perpetuate a system where minorities and women are chronically underrepresented. I know you share this goal. Your recent appointment of Ambassador Winstanley as Chief Diversity and Inclusion Officer is a very positive step. Nevertheless, previous Secretaries of State did not effectively tackle the deeply rooted institutional and structural barriers to diversity at the Department. I am anxious to hear how you



will hold yourself and the rest of the building accountable to finally breaking through and putting in place long-lasting and effective solutions.

I am also eager to discuss this Administration's approach to traditionally underprioritized regions of the world, including Sub-Saharan Africa and the Caribbean. Additionally, I am concerned about the lack of action on Cuba policy, which in my view has not had the level of priority I had expected. We need to turn the page from the previous administration's outdated and counterproductive policies and return to engagement and dialogue in order to resolve our differences and press for change. What I see so far is the opposite. I am particularly anxious to know the rationale for not reversing the last minute listing of Cuba as a state sponsor of terrorism by the Trump administration.

Mr. Secretary, the recent outbreak of conflict between Israelis and Palestinians was, and is, deeply concerning. Thank you for your work in achieving the ceasefire. The last four years have been extremely difficult ones for the Palestinian people. The previous administration's cruel and irresponsible policy resulted in closed diplomatic missions, the suspension of humanitarian and development aid, and unprecedented levels of mistrust and resentment toward American involvement in the Middle East amongst the Palestinian people – let alone further setting back the cause of a two state solution. I appreciate the President's commitment to restarting our assistance to the Palestinians and to “advancing prosperity, security, and freedom for both Israelis and Palestinians in tangible ways.”. The fiscal year 2020 and fiscal year 2021 enacted SFOPS bills included funds for humanitarian and development programs in the West Bank and Gaza, which were passed without controversy or partisan debate. I am pleased your fiscal year 2022 request proposes \$218 million for such assistance, although I believe we can, and should, do more.

I'm pleased that the Administration is renewing diplomatic focus and resources to the Northern Triangle countries. The halt in our assistance during the previous Administration not only set us back from addressing the root causes of migration, it cost critical time and credibility needed to make progress on human rights, economic opportunity, combatting corruption, and upholding the rule of law. Nevertheless, before committing to a four year and \$4 billion plan, which includes an \$860 million request this year, Congress needs to understand how we will measure progress and ensure long-lasting impact, particularly on fighting combating corruption and impunity in the region.

The Biden Administration's budget request also includes a commitment to restoring America's standing in the world through robust engagement with the United Nations and funding for the World Health Organization, UNFPA, and the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, among other international organizations. I fully support efforts to reinvigorate our multilateral



partnerships so that we are better positioned to tackle today's global challenges from the COVID-19 pandemic to climate change and the many secondary impacts of both.

Before I conclude, I must say that I am also immensely disappointed that over the last four years the United States has not paid its full UN peacekeeping assessments and that we have accrued over one billion dollars in arrears. As Chairwoman, I am fully committed to partnering with the Biden-Harris Administration on meeting our annual assessed payments, paying down our UN arrears and putting in place a realistic solution that prevents this type of staggering dereliction of responsibility by the United States again.

Mr. Secretary, it's clear we have much to discuss today, but I want to thank you, again, for your tireless work on behalf of the American people and your leadership and dedication to the most pressing foreign policy issues of our time. I hope this is the first of many discussions between you and this Subcommittee. I look forward your testimony.