

Statement for Submission into the Record

NOMINATION OF ANTONY J. BLINKEN

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 19, 2014

U.S. Senate,  
Committee on Foreign Relations,  
Washington, D.C.

Hon. Antony J. Blinken, of New York, to be  
Deputy Secretary of State

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Corker, members of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, it is an honor to appear before you today as President Obama's nominee to become Deputy Secretary of State.

I'm grateful to President Obama for the privilege of this nomination and to two past chairmen of this Committee -- to Secretary of State Kerry for his confidence in me; and to Vice President Biden for his friendship, partnership and mentorship for more than a decade.

It is a novel experience for me to sit on this side of the dais. For six years, I served as staff director of this committee, in the majority and the minority. I sat where Mr. O'Brien and Mr. Munson sit -- in my case behind then Senators Biden, Helms, Lugar, Hagel, Dodd, Kerry, Obama as well as several distinguished Senators here today. I watched them work together in the best tradition of bipartisan American foreign policy to strengthen American diplomacy and advance our interests and values around the world. During those six years, I developed enormous respect for the Senate as a whole and for this Committee in particular -- for its members, its staff, and its indispensable role in shaping our foreign policy.

If confirmed, I will do my best to uphold the standards of professionalism that I learned here, in this room and in these halls. And I pledge to work closely with all of you to fulfill the potential of American leadership.

There is another reason I am so attached to this Committee. It confirmed my father, Donald Blinken, to be ambassador to Hungary; my uncle, Alan Blinken, to be ambassador to Belgium, and just last year, my wife, Evan Ryan, to be Assistant Secretary of State for Educational and Cultural Affairs. I hope that nothing I do today gives you cause to break this family tradition of diplomatic service.

I recognize that, if confirmed, I will play a different role. Part of my current job at the White House is to explain and defend this administration's policies – including with Congress. If confirmed, my new job would bring a different responsibility – to work with this Committee and the leadership of the State Department to advance our foreign policy and the national interest around the world. I've consulted with leaders I consider friends who have played this role in the past – including Bob Zoellick, John Negroponte, Rich Armitage, Jim Steinberg and Strobe Talbott. If confirmed, my role model would be my immediate predecessor, Bill Burns – a man who epitomizes the word “professional”, and who served Republican and Democratic administrations alike with integrity, balance and decency.

I want to begin by thanking the Committee for its work over the last two years. Whether it was the Ukraine loan guarantee, PEPFAR reauthorization, Embassy Security, OAS reform, or pushing forward State Department nominees, this Committee played an indispensable role in translating our foreign policy vision into practice.

If confirmed, my new position would bring me full circle to where I started in government 21 years ago: the Department of State. Virtually every day since – during my time at State; my 13 years over two administrations on the National Security Council Staff at the White House; and my tenure with this Committee -- I've worked with the men and women of the State Department. I've experienced first-hand their extraordinary leadership of our foreign policy at a time of immense challenge and change. I've watched them do more than most Americans will ever know to keep us safe, secure and prosperous. I've witnessed their passion, energy and courage. I've seen them bring luster and strength to a word that deserves our respect: diplomacy.

Just in the past year, American diplomacy has mobilized countries around the world to confront ISIL and Ebola, to sanction Russia for its aggression in Ukraine and to revitalize NATO's commitment to the defense of its members. That same hard-nosed diplomacy, backed by a credible threat of military force, eliminated Syria's chemical weapons stockpiles and achieved a first-step agreement with Iran that stopped and in some respects rolled back its nuclear program. Secretary Kerry's personal diplomacy helped competing Afghan political blocs achieve the first peaceful political transition in their country's history. And he has worked tirelessly to build a secure, lasting peace between the Jewish, democratic state of Israel and the Palestinians – just as we stand resolutely with Israel whenever and wherever it is under threat.

We saw American diplomacy in action this summer, at the first ever U.S. – Africa Leaders Summit – building new relationships among governments and the private sector to unleash the next era of African growth, to strengthen democratic institutions, and to deepen our security partnerships.

We saw it again at the Inter-American Development Bank, where Vice President Biden convened two dozen countries to build support for the efforts of Central American leaders to strengthen their institutions and economies, and combat the corruption, crime and trafficking that affect our own security here in the United States.

And just this past week, President Obama led the administration’s diplomacy in Asia to strengthen its core institutions; to enlist China in the effort to roll back climate change, build greater confidence between our militaries, lower tariffs on information technology and expand visas to the benefit of our students, businesses and economy; to advance Burma’s democratization; and to bring the Trans-Pacific Partnership closer to fruition – further liberalizing trade among economies that represent 40% of world GDP.

In a few weeks, just before Christmas, many of us will engage in an annual ritual: watching “It’s a Wonderful Life” on television. We all know what happened to Bedford Falls when George Bailey was out of the picture. I think it is self-evident where the world would be without American leadership on all the challenges I just mentioned.

So I would submit to you that the question before us is not *whether* America is leading – for we are – but rather *how* we are leading – by what means and to what ends – now and into the future. That is the question we can – and must – answer together.

For all the progress we’ve made, many daunting challenges remain.

We’ve struck huge blows against Al Qaeda’s senior leadership; now, we must defeat its progeny in the Middle East and North Africa, which threaten our interests, allies and partners.

We liberated the people of Libya from a tyrant; now, we must work with the new government to fill a power vacuum and address that country’s turmoil.

We eliminated the strategic threat posed by Syria’s chemical weapons; now, we must stop a civil war that rages on, killing innocents, sending waves of refugees throughout the region and attracting violent extremists.

We've advanced nuclear security around the world, with countries taking concrete steps to secure or eliminate materials; now, we must press for the denuclearization of the Korean peninsula and pursue a comprehensive agreement to ensure that Iran's nuclear program is for peaceful purposes.

We have strengthened the security and resilience of the internet that is so vital to our economy, safety and health; now, we must get ahead of attacks by malicious governments, criminals and individual actors.

We've made America the world leader in fighting pandemics and improving global health security – building on the work of the Bush administration; now our leadership is vital to checking the spread of infectious diseases, with new microbes and viruses and the potential deliberate release of pathogens all accelerated by globalization.

We've led the way in promoting more open governance, combating corruption and empowering civil society and young leaders in emerging democracies; now, we must help those making the transition from demanding rights and freedoms to building the institutions that can guarantee them.

We've emerged from the global economic crisis and revitalized our own economy as an engine for global economic growth; now, our leadership remains critical to prevent future crises that threaten global stability.

The strategic environment in which we must contend with these and other challenges is more fluid, fraught with complexity but also more full of opportunity than ever before.

Power among states is shifting, with new entrants and aspirants to the ranks of the majors.

Power is shifting below and beyond the nation-state, requiring governments to be more accountable to sub-state and non-state actors – including increasingly empowered individuals.

The growing interdependence of the global economy and the rapid pace of technological change are linking people, groups and governments in unprecedented ways – incentivizing new forms of cooperation but also creating shared vulnerabilities.

A struggle for power is underway among and within many states in the Middle East and North Africa – a combustible process of defining a new order.

The global energy market is in the midst of profound change, with developing countries now consuming more energy than developed ones and the United States the world's largest natural gas and oil producer, with our dependence on foreign oil at a 20 year low and declining.

To most effectively advance America's interests in such a volatile environment, we must lead with purpose – to ensure the security of our country, its citizens, our allies and our partners; to promote a strong U.S. economy; to advance our values; and to shape an international order that bolsters peace, security and opportunity.

We must lead from a position of strength – with unrivaled military might, a dynamic economy and the unmatched strength of our human resources.

We must lead by example – lifting our citizens, growing our economy and living our values here at home, all of which strengthen our leadership abroad.

We must lead with capable partners – because we can best advance our interests in an interconnected world when others are working with us, while recognizing that American leadership is necessary to mobilize collective action.

We must lead with all of the instruments of American power – with an ever-ready military and our economic might that can empower diplomacy and development.

And we must lead with perspective. For all our unique power, there are historic transitions underway in the world that are not about us and cannot be fully controlled by us. But American leadership, more than that of any other nation, can shape this change, mitigate its risks and seize its opportunities.

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Corker, members of the Committee -- we all share a stake in and a commitment to the continued renewal of American leadership in the world. Congress plays a vital role in this. Our foreign policy is more effective and sustainable when it benefits from strong Congressional engagement and oversight. Even when there are disagreements, I know firsthand and from both ends of Pennsylvania Avenue the imperative of open dialogue and working together. If confirmed, I look forward to working with you to advance American leadership and diplomacy, to deliver results for the American people and to make our country – and the world – more peaceful and prosperous.

Thank you for your consideration.