



FEDERAL POLICY BRIEFING
ADVANCING PEACE, SECURITY AND HUMAN RIGHTS
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Human Rights, Peace and Security Priorities of the Administration

March 18, 2013, 10:30 - 11:30 am

Speaker

- **Antony Blinken**, White House Deputy National Security Advisor

Facilitator

- **David Abramowitz**, Vice-President, Policy and Government Relations, Humanity United

Antony Blinken opened his remarks by saying he's grateful for the work those in the room are doing. He expressed that this work empowers voices and fosters change around the world.

Blinken began by reflecting on the last four years. In 2008, he said the country faced a lot of challenges, including two wars, frayed foreign alliances, and the state of the domestic economy. In the U.S., he elaborated, we had lost four million jobs and at the same time, global politics were rapidly changing. He stated that it took the better part of four years to work through these challenges. Since then, the U.S. exited Iraq and has made a conscious effort to foster our alliances with Europe. He continued by explaining that the U.S. had found mutual interests with China, Turkey, South Africa, and Brazil, all of which has advanced the U.S.' own agenda. The administration is now working within a multilateral framework to address Iran, North Korea, and other aggressive states, he said. Further, the administration opened new markets with Russia and Korea, and it made an effort to forge a free trade agreement with the European Union. Blinken also said the administration continues to move forward on developing an AIDS-free generation, and as the President said in the State of the Union address, the administration will continue to move forward on climate change. Blinken explained that this is the broad historical context of the present moment.

Blinken noted recent events have demonstrated that the principles of freedom and self-determination are not unique to the West. The Arab Spring and peaceful transitions of power in Burma and Malawi have been examples of this. These past four years have reminded the administration that change is hard. The President's approach begins with a simple idea: when we protect human rights and security here at home, we can then advance them abroad. To this end, Blinken said, the administration has repealed Don't Ask Don't Tell, passed universal health care, passed the Fair Pay Act, reauthorized the Violence Against Women Act, and strengthened protections against human trafficking. Blinken expressed that the greatest measurement of the U.S.' commitment to human rights is the way in which we pursue our enemies. The administration has shut down secret prisons overseas, confirmed their commitment to fair treatment, and reduced prisoner numbers at Guantanamo. He explained that the administration sees change happening from the bottom up, too. Blinken said a major facet of the

administration's human rights policy is empowering civil society around the world and that the administration aims to engage activists at all levels.

While the administration focuses on the long term, Blinken said they also have an obligation to focus on those facing threats right now. Some of this work in this area is structural, he said, such as how the administration created an atrocity prevention board. When we have structural policies in place, he noted, policymakers have more tools to use at their disposal to respond to them.

While we've made tangible gains, Blinken said, there is a huge amount of work to be done. He listed what the administration will continue to prioritize:

- Grow investments we've made in the last term. We're going to refresh our own national action plan and our commitment to transparency.
- Continue to foster democracy and human rights in the Middle East, including focusing on the rights of women and minorities.
- Continue to work with private sector and grantmakers
- Continue to engage multilateral organizations to give us new opportunities to advance human rights, including supporting creation of mission of inquiry in North Korea
- Support strengthening our commitment to the rule of law here at home
- We're looking ahead to create greater transparency with regard to our counterterrorism efforts.
- Continue to be a voice for women's rights
- Prevention of atrocities continues to be at the heart of the administration's human rights policy

Blinken ended with saying that this broad agenda can't be accomplished without the leadership, advocacy, and resources of those in the room.

Questions

One participant asked how sequestration will affect the defense budget going forward.

Blinken answered that sequestration will affect defense across the board. He said the administration is looking hard at the prospect of further reductions in nuclear arsenal in coordination with Russia. Last week, Blinken noted, Secretary Hagel announced the cancellation of phase four of the European missile defense program for budgetary reasons and a desire to shift resources to counter a potential threat from North Korea. Blinken told the group to expect the President to address the U.S. nuclear weapons posture and arms control aspirations in detail in the coming months.

Participants contributed questions on a diverse array of countries: North Korea, Kenya, and Egypt.

Blinken said that in North Korea, a greater focus on human rights and a simultaneous focus on North Korea's obligations regarding nuclear disarmament are not mutually exclusive. China's role could be decisive and for the first time in a while China's government is deeply unhappy with the North Korean regime. Raising the profile of human rights in North Korea won't necessarily change the North Korean government's nuclear plans, Blinken concluded.

Blinken then turned to the question of Kenya. It's encouraging that Odinga is challenging the recent election results through a legal process and is calling on supporters to not resort to violence. A verdict is

a few weeks away, Blinken said, but the administration is considering how it would deal with a government led by someone indicted by International Criminal Court. Kenya has been a strong partner to the U.S. in some areas, and the U.S. has a commitment to the Kenyan people, he emphasized, but he said the administration also has a desire not to enhance the position of those indicted by the ICC. He concluded by saying there may be a way to engage substantially with Kenya without elevating the position of their leader.

Blinken addressed Egypt, saying that the administration is constantly reminded of the importance of the the Egyptian government upholding its obligations, particularly around women's rights. Anne Patterson, the Ambassador to Egypt, talked with Morsi last week about our deep concern about sexual violence against women during demonstrations. On one hand, Blinken explained, the Muslim Brotherhood and Morsi can be proud that their success is based on their successful engagement of citizens at the local level; however, he continued, now that they're at this level of power, they have to show a responsible face to the world which includes treating women and minorities with respect. If it doesn't happen that way, he said, it creates a huge challenge for all of us. The Egyptian economy could fail, with consequences not only for Egypt but for the region. We're working with them as much as possible to hold them to their obligations, he concluded.

Another participation contributed a question on nuclear reductions. Blinken stated that the administration is determined to pursue reductions. At the same time the administration is trying to make investments in nuclear complex infrastructure and modernization, and to ensure that the weapons they do have are working.

Finally, Blinken ended his remarks with thanking those in the room for asking important questions because it helps keep the administration accountable. He thanked everyone again for using their resources and advocacy to advance human progress around the world.