



[New Secretary of State Blinken Gives His First Interview Since Taking Office](#)

On Monday, new Secretary of State Antony Blinken gave his first interview since taking office and touched on a variety of subjects. The topics discussed included the United States' relationship with China and Saudi Arabia in the face of major human rights concerns, as well as criticism of the Russian government over the recent detainment of opposition leader Alexei Navalny. Secretary Blinken called China the most significant ongoing challenge to the United States because of the countries' multifaceted relationship. He also addressed nuclear policy, saying the Biden administration would be conditionally willing to rejoin the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) with Iran, and wanted to work with allies to limit North Korea's nuclear capacity. Blinken was also asked about the human rights records of several U.S. allies, specifically Saudi Arabia, to which he replied it was vital for the Biden administration to ensure that allies were working in a manner consistent with American values.

The interview between Secretary Blinken and Andrea Mitchell of NBC News began by Mitchell querying Blinken on the recent developments in Russia regarding opposition leader Alexei Navalny. Navalny, who was poisoned by members of Russia's intelligence service, recently returned to the country after seeking treatment abroad and was sentenced to 3.5 years in prison for violating his terms of parole. Blinken condemned the treatment of Navalny and of protesters who gathered to call for his release after security forces violently dispersed them. The secretary also hinted at forthcoming U.S. sanctions on Russia as retribution for the SolarWinds cyber-attack, the placing of bounties on U.S. troops in Afghanistan, and interference in American elections.

Andrea Mitchell also asked Secretary Blinken about the United States' ongoing relationship with China and the challenges between the countries. He responded that U.S.-Sino relations were the most challenging of any bilateral relationship at the moment due to the different diplomatic aspects. On one hand, there is an adversarial and competitive relationship between the U.S. and China over issues such as human rights and intellectual property. On the other hand, the U.S. and China work together in several areas including trade. Blinken also criticized China heavily for their action in delaying information to the rest of the world at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, and for repressing freedom in Hong Kong. Finally, Secretary Blinken said he was in favor of taking a stronger position against China's ethnic cleansing of Uyghur Muslims than his predecessor was.

The interview with Secretary Blinken concluded with a discussion about the Middle East. Blinken was one of the negotiators of the original JCPOA during the Obama administration, and both he and President Biden have expressed a desire to return to the agreement. However, Blinken said the United States would only return to the deal if Iran returns to compliance with the previously agreed upon regulations to its nuclear program. Saudi Arabia was also discussed, and Blinken said that the country's dire human rights record was a significant cause for concern. He condemned the extrajudicial murder of journalist Jamal Khashoggi, and said that any alliance the United States kept must be in accordance with its values. As a result, President Biden and his administration is currently in the process of reviewing the relationship between the United States and the Saudi Arabian regime.