

# Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken and Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin Remarks to Traveling Press

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SECRETARY OF STATE BLINKEN: Morning, everybody. Secretary Austin and I just returned from Kyiv, where we went at the request of President Biden and the invitation of President Zelenskyy. We had an opportunity to demonstrate directly our strong support, our strong ongoing support for the Ukrainian Government and for the Ukrainian people. This was, in our judgment, an important moment to be there, an important moment for Ukraine, for the war – an important moment to have face-to-face conversations in detail about the extraordinary support that we’ve provided: security, economic, humanitarian, as well as the massive pressure that we’ve been exerting on Russia, and then to talk in detail about how we carry that forward across all of those fronts.

I would say that, without putting words in his mouth, President Zelenskyy expressed deep appreciation for President Biden’s leadership and for the incredible generosity and support of the American people. In turn, we expressed deep admiration for his leadership, for the extraordinary courage of Ukrainians in standing up to and pushing back this Russian aggression.

Part of our commitment going forward involves a number of things that I was able to share with President Zelenskyy yesterday, including the return of American diplomats to Ukraine starting next[i] week, including President Biden’s intent to nominate a new ambassador to Ukraine, Ambassador Bridget Brink – currently an ambassador, someone I’ve served with for a long time, deeply experienced in the region, who’ll be a very strong representative for the United States in Ukraine.

We had an opportunity as well to talk about where this goes from here, with the success that Ukraine has had. It’s also true that Russia continues to try to brutalize parts of the country, and the death and destruction that we continue to see is horrific. But Ukrainians are standing up, they’re standing strong, and they’re doing that with the support that we have coordinated from literally around the world.

The strategy that we’ve put in place – massive support for Ukraine, massive pressure against Russia, solidarity with more than 30 countries engaged in these efforts – is having real results. And we’re seeing that when it comes to Russia’s war aims, Russia is failing, Ukraine is succeeding. Russia has sought as its principal aim to totally subjugate Ukraine – to take away its sovereignty, to take away its independence. That has failed. It’s sought to assert the power of its military and its economy. We of course are seeing just the opposite – a military that is dramatically underperforming; an economy, as a result of sanctions, as a result of a mass exodus from Russia, that is in shambles. And it’s sought to divide the West and NATO; of course, we’re seeing exactly the opposite – an Alliance more divided[ii]

than I've ever seen it and, indeed, new countries considering applying for membership.

The bottom line is this. We don't know how the rest of this war will unfold, but we do know that a sovereign, independent Ukraine will be around a lot longer than Vladimir Putin is on the scene. And our support for Ukraine going forward will continue. It will continue until we see final success.

Secretary?

SECRETARY OF DEFENSE AUSTIN: Yeah. Good morning. And first of all, let me echo what Secretary Blinken has said in terms of the characterization of our meeting. I think it was a very productive meeting, very engaging session, and we were very happy to have that opportunity.

So during the meeting, we expressed our deepest condolences to the president for the loss of so many civilians and, of course, the loss of those courageous troops that have done just a magnificent job of pushing back Russian forces. We also expressed our admiration for their professionalism and for their commitment to defend their democracy. Just it's been extraordinary to watch, and I think everyone would agree with me there.

I agree with Secretary Blinken that the president did express his deep appreciation, along with the minister of defense and the chief of defense, their deep appreciation for what the American people have continued to do to ensure that we get them as much assistance as possible, as quickly as possible.

So our focus in the meeting was to talk about those things that would enable us to win the current fight and also build for tomorrow. And again, a very productive discussion. We talked about security force assistance and we talked about training, and we also talked about the key things that we're going to discuss in the session that I'll conduct tomorrow at Ramstein with a number of ministers of defense and chiefs of defense. This session is focused on doing things to generate additional capability and capacity for the Ukrainian forces. And so it's a great opportunity to get a good update from the CHOD and from the minister of defense and from the president on the things that they are focused on, the things that they need. That'll enable us to have a more productive discussion with the CHODs and ministers of defense tomorrow.

STATE DEPARTMENT SPOKESPERSON NED PRICE: Missy.

Q: Secretary Austin, Secretary Blinken, I'm just wondering if you can tell us what you saw during your visit to Kyiv, on your journey on the way to Kyiv and what you saw in the city. Were you able to speak to any Ukrainians outside the government and what did they tell you, if so?

And then for either of you, do you see a scenario where international support enables Ukraine to avoid losing this war to Russia, but isn't able to fully expel Russian forces or reclaim its victory, and how would you think about such a scenario? Thanks.

SECRETARY BLINKEN: Happy to start. In terms of what we saw, we took a train into Kyiv from southwestern[iii] Poland, so didn't see a lot except looking out the train windows on our way in. And in Kyiv itself, we went right to the presidential palace. We spent about three hours with President Zelenskyy, with his senior team. That was the entire focus of our visit. We wanted to focus on the work that needed to be done in looking at the game plan that we have, how we're moving forward across all of these different lines of effort. So that was the entire focus. There wasn't much of an opportunity to talk to average Ukrainians. We certainly saw people on the streets in Kyiv, evidence of the fact that the battle for Kyiv was won and there is what looks from the surface, at least, to be normal life in Kyiv. But that's in stark contrast to what's going on in other parts of Ukraine, in the south and the east, where the Russian brutality is doing horrific things to people every single day.

In terms of wars won and lost, again, I come back to the proposition that in terms of Russia's war aims, Russia has already failed and Ukraine has already succeeded because the principal aim that President Putin brought to this, in his own words, was to fully subsume Ukraine back into Russia, to take away its sovereignty and independence, and that has not happened and clearly will not happen. Where the contours of the war goes from here, how much death and destruction continues, obviously that's of deep concern. We want to do everything we can to help the Ukrainians bring this to an end on the possible terms as quickly as possible. Much of the work that we're doing is enabling them to strengthen their hand both on the battlefield right now, but also, eventually, at a negotiation if there is one.

SECRETARY AUSTIN: I agree with Secretary Blinken. We were focused on the conduct of the meeting and engaging the senior leadership, so we didn't get a chance to do any walkabouts or engage civilians or citizens on the street. On the way in, it did look like things were beginning to come back to normal. It was Easter day, so in the – in Kyiv, so certainly a number of people would have been at home and not out on the street.

In terms of our – their ability to win, the first step in winning is believing that you can win. And so they believe that we can win; we believe that they – we can win – they can win if they have the right equipment, the right support. And we're going to do everything we can – continue to do everything we can to ensure that that gets there. So we're engaged with the CHOD, engaged with the minister of defense, and as this fight evolves, their needs will change. And so as those needs change, we'd like to be one step ahead, but we're going to be responsive to what the CHOD and the MOD believe that they need.

MR. PRICE: Jenny.

Q: Secretary Austin, I have a question about aid deliveries. How are you tracking the Stingers and the Javelins and the – those sensitive weapons? We're seeing more and more imagery of those weapons falling into the hands of Russian-backed forces in Donbas. Do you have a plan to track those weapons?

And in terms of humanitarian aid, Secretary Blinken, there's an article in the Boston Globe today quoting a USAID official saying that the billion dollars in aid passed by Congress has not even been transferred to USAID accounts and that much of the aid that's supposed to be going into Ukraine has not been delivered, calling it a critical strategic failure. How do you plan to fix this problem?

SECRETARY AUSTIN: The first part of the question, Jen – thanks for that question – in terms of our ability to track the weapons that are going in. As you know, we don't have any forces on the ground, so that's – it's difficult for us to do. We did have a very good discussion with both the CHOD and the president and minister of defense on the necessity to make sure that those weapons are tracked and, as best possible, to make sure that they're protected from falling into the hands of adversaries.

Now, when you're in a fight, as you know, if a specific battle is lost, then you have less control over that – over your ability to control items. But they are focused on this issue and they know we are concerned about it, and we'll continue to engage.

SECRETARY BLINKEN: And Jennifer, in terms of the humanitarian assistance, hundreds of millions of dollars of assistance has already gotten in not only to Ukraine, but to surrounding countries that are caring for Ukrainians who have been displaced, who are refugees. Literally every day, as we speak, aid is going in. This is aid. If you were here in a few hours, this won't be here. It's going to be on a plane on its way, or some other means, on its way to Ukraine, and then it is dispersed throughout the country. We've had detailed conversations with our Ukrainian partners about making sure that once the assistance gets into Ukraine, it then is dispersed, as the Secretary of Defense was saying about the weaponry, in an effective way. And if there are bottlenecks there or challenges there, we're working through them.

But what I'm seeing, at least, is that aid is getting here and other distribution points, it's getting out the door incredibly quickly. Again, this place is going to look different five or six hours from now than it does right now.

MR. PRICE: Will.

Q: Thanks so much. Secretary Austin, you mentioned keeping abreast of what the Ukrainians need. We've seen sort of some 155 millimeter Howitzers and other things be processed through here. What did President Zelenskyy say he needs next?

And for Secretary Blinken, I understand you may have spoken with the UN secretary-general about his upcoming visit. What is the strategy for engaging – for his engagement or for (inaudible) engagement with Moscow and Kyiv to see if (inaudible)?

SECRETARY AUSTIN: As you've heard us talk or say in the past, recent past, the nature of the fight

has evolved because the terrain that they're now focused on is a different type of terrain. So they need long-range fires. You've heard them express a need for tanks. And we are doing everything that we can to get them the types of support, the types of artillery and munitions that will be effective in this stage of the fight. And so we'll get a chance to – we've done a lot, as you know. You've seen what we've done here in the recent past with the 800 – the recent \$800 million authorization provided by the President allows us to provide five battalions of 1-5-5 Howitzers, hundreds of thousands of rounds of artillery. And so we're also engaging our colleagues in other countries for the same type of capability, and we see indications early on that they're going to – they're going to be – many countries are going to come forward and provide additional munitions and Howitzers.

So we're going to push as hard as we can as quickly as we can to get them what they need. This will be a great topic of conversation for our meeting tomorrow as we go down to Ramstein.

SECRETARY BLINKEN: And in terms of the secretary-general, I spoke to the UN secretary-general on Friday and he is heading to Moscow early this week, and our expectation is that he's going to carry a very strong and clear message to Vladimir Putin, which is the need to end this war now – the need for a ceasefire; the need for humanitarian corridors, for aid to get in, for people to be able to get out; the need for Russia to stop its brutalization of Ukraine. It's a clear, direct message that he should be carrying on behalf of virtually the entire international community.

MR. PRICE: John.

Q: Hi. Are you defining America's goals for success any differently in Ukraine now than you were at the beginning of this war? And if so, what are those goals today?

SECRETARY AUSTIN: You want? I'll just start and I'll let the Secretary of State to give his thoughts. But I think – and he's already kind of indicated the first piece of this. We want to see Ukraine remain a sovereign country, a democratic country able to protect its sovereign territory. We want to see Russia weakened to the degree that it can't do the kinds of things that it has done in invading Ukraine.

So it has already lost a lot of military capability, and a lot of its troops, quite frankly. And we want to see them not have the capability to very quickly reproduce that capability. We want to see the international community more united, especially NATO, and we're seeing that, and that's based upon the hard work of, number one, President Biden, but also our Allies and partners who have willingly leaned into this with us as we've imposed sanctions and as we've moved very rapidly to demonstrate that we're going to defend every inch of NATO.

SECRETARY BLINKEN: Yeah, and really nothing to add. I think the Secretary said it very well. Thanks.

MR. PRICE: We'll take a final question. Matt.

Q: Thanks. Mr. Secretary, were you able to offer President Zelenskyy any idea about timing for reopening the embassy in Kyiv, not simply the return of diplomats to Lviv?

And then for both of you: President Zelenskyy, when he kind of leaked the – that you guys were going there on Saturday, said, "Please don't come with empty hands." You obviously didn't go with empty hands, but did you get the sense that he is satisfied with what it was that you did bring?

SECRETARY BLINKEN: Matt, in terms of the embassy, we will have American diplomats back in Ukraine starting next[iv] week. They'll then start the process of looking at how we actually reopen the embassy itself in Kyiv. I think that will take place over a couple of weeks would be my expectation. We're doing it deliberately, we're doing it carefully, we're doing it with the security of our personnel foremost in mind, but we're doing it.

And with regard to President Zelenskyy, again, without wanting to characterize him too much, I can just repeat what I said earlier. He expressed to both of us deep and repeated appreciation both for President Biden's leadership but also for the generosity of the American people. I think he said, Lloyd, that the United States has been Ukraine's strongest supporter, something that they won't forget. And look, we never – we never come empty handed because this is – as the Secretary of Defense said, this has been an ongoing process where we have been, from before day one – because remember, the initial drawdowns that President Biden ordered go back to last Labor Day, months before the aggression.

We wanted to make sure that if Russia pursued the aggression, that Ukrainians had in hand the tools they needed to stop it, to push it back, and that's exactly what happened thanks to their courage, to their commitment, but also thanks to the equipment that they had in hand from before the war started they were able to do that. But as the Secretary said, this has been evolving, and so the nature of our assistance and the assistance we're getting from others has been evolving.

SECRETARY AUSTIN: And as you would expect, he did express gratitude to the American people and our allies and partners for what they're – they've done from the very beginning and continue to do. But he's in a fight, and so while he's grateful for all the things that we're doing, he's also focused on what he thinks he'll need next in order to be successful. And again, they have the mindset that they want to win; we have the mindset that we want to help them win, and we are going to do that.

Now, in terms of specific types of things that we were able to discuss and kind of lay out, we reminded them that Thursday President Biden signed a drawdown and on Saturday Howitzers were showing up from that drawdown package. That is unimaginable speed, and it's due to the hard work of all the men and women who are working day out – day in and day out to do the kinds of things that

they're doing. But we're going to remain focused on giving him what he needs to be successful in the future, and that's what you'd expect. You'd expect for him to say, "Thanks, but" – and he's really grateful – "but let's focus on what needs to be done." We'll get a chance to talk some more about that in our meeting with the CHODs tomorrow, and I look forward to that meeting.

MR. PRICE: Thank you, gentlemen.

SECRETARY BLINKEN: Thanks, everyone.

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