

*****Note that this is an automated transcription and may contain inaccuracies. Please refer to the [original YouTube recording](#) as well*****

9:05 — 9:45 AM MDT

Fireside Chat with **Antony J. Blinken**

Antony J. Blinken, 71st U.S. Secretary of State, U.S. Department of State

Moderator: **Mary Louise Kelly**, Co-Host, All Things Considered, NPR

Session recording:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Uryz-AXHoyI&list=PL7fuyfNu8jfPTKp6PJ2yJugSfxXEDyEqM&index=33>

Mary Louise Kelly

I want to start with what is truly the biggest game changer since we last gathered here, which is October 7, the Hamas attack on Israel, the Israeli response in Gaza war in the Middle East. Our ambassador at the United Nations, Linda Thomas Greenfield, said this week, and I quote, that negotiations on a ceasefire are trending in the right direction. Is she right and and on What is that based?

Antony J. Blinken

Well, first of all, good morning everyone, and it's wonderful to be here back in Aspen and with this remarkable group, yeah, there's a lot going on, and the Middle East is front and center. What Linda said is right, I believe we're inside the 10 yard line and driving toward the goal line on getting an agreement that would produce a ceasefire, get the hostages home, and put us on a better track to trying to build lasting peace and stability.

Mary Louise Kelly

And again, on what is that based?

Antony J. Blinken

It's based on,

Mary Louise Kelly

Other than hope

Antony J. Blinken

Yes, because hope's good, but it's but it's insufficient. No, it's based on, on reality, and the reality is this. A month ago, President Biden put out a detailed proposal for getting to a ceasefire, release of hostages, and the ability to move forward. And what happened after that was quite extraordinary. The entire world came together in support of that proposal, country after country standing up and endorsing it. The United Nations Security Council, where Linda did a tremendous job coming together, something we don't see that often these days, 14 to nothing, with Russia abstaining in support of that agreement, and the result was, after a lot of pushing and diplomacy, in the weeks after that, we have an agreement to the framework The President put out by both Israel and Hamas. The question now is finishing the negotiation of some critical details.

*****Note that this is an automated transcription and may contain inaccuracies. Please refer to the [original YouTube recording](#) as well*****

Mary Louise Kelly

That Hamas hasn't signed on have they?

Antony J. Blinken

They signed on to the framework, and that's what's so important. But there remain some some issues that need to be resolved, that need to be negotiated. We're in the midst of doing exactly that. And by the way, when I said we're inside the 10 yard line, we are now. We also know that with anything the last 10 yards are often the hardest. So I don't want to be in any way naive about it. But based on everything we've been doing for these last now, really six months, because starting in January, we believed, and we continue to believe, that the quickest way to bring this war to an end, to bring relief to the people of Gaza, who so desperately need it, to put Gaza itself, to put the entire region on a better path, is through an agreement on a ceasefire and a hostages. That's actually the quickest way to get it done.

Mary Louise Kelly

Netanyahu will be in DC on Monday. What's your big ask of him? What would count as a successful visit?

Antony J. Blinken

Well, I think we need to make sure of two things. We, of course, want to bring this agreement over the finish line. But while that's necessary, it's also not enough, because what's critical once we get it, assuming we do is to make sure that there's a clear plan for what follows the so called day after plan. Because what we can't have is this. What we can't have is an agreement that's followed by some kind of void that will either be filled if it's there by Hamas coming back, which is unacceptable, by Israel prolonging its occupation of Gaza, which they say they don't want to do and is unacceptable. Or just having a vacuum that's filled by lawlessness. It's filled by chaos, which we see in so many parts of Gaza right now, which is also inimical to actually helping people who desperately need it. So making sure that we have a plan in place, which we've been working on, also every single day, with our partners, with Israel, with many others, for governance, for security, for humanitarian assistance, for reconstruction, that's critical, and I imagine the discussions with the Prime Minister will center around that.

Mary Louise Kelly

And have you figured out how to deal with Netanyahu? The administration has tried the bear hug, unwavering support. You tried pressure and withholding 2000 pound bombs. Where are you now?

Antony J. Blinken

I'm not focused on personalities. I'm focused on policies, and we want to make sure as we go forward with anyone whether it's our Israeli allies or anyone else that we reach agreements on the concrete steps to be taken to move whatever it is we're trying to move forward.

Mary Louise Kelly

*****Note that this is an automated transcription and may contain inaccuracies. Please refer to the [original YouTube recording](#) as well*****

I'll ask it a slightly different way. Have you figured out what Netanyahu wants? Do you give any credence to the view among many analysts in Israel that he would actually kind of like to slow walk or even thwart a ceasefire and hostage deal, because the far right in his coalition oppose it, and it could cost him his job.

Antony J. Blinken

What I'm seeing, what I'm hearing across Israeli society, is a strong desire to get this done, to get a ceasefire, to get the hostages home after so many months, including and it's often forgotten here American hostages. I've met with the American hostage families and other hostage families I don't know 10, 12, times. So the President has Jake Sullivan has many others in our administration have. So this is, this is real and personal to so many of us, but for the Israeli people, bringing people home is their number one priority, and I believe getting a ceasefire is something that most Israelis support at the same time, we have to get this because the suffering of people every single day, innocent men, women and children who have been caught for the last nine months in a crossfire of Hamas' making that has to end too.

Mary Louise Kelly

I appreciate your reminding all of us of the obvious, that these are real humans and lives at stake, because that is clearly important. And at the center of this one more in the Middle East is the two state solution dead.

Antony J. Blinken

Not only is it not dead, it can't be, and it's

Mary Louise Kelly

It's very hard to find a path to optimism, given that Israelis are now resisting it, government, ordinary people. Gaza is destroyed. Settlers are taking more land in the West Bank. Where does that leave room for hope?

Antony J. Blinken

You know, John McCain used to say that it's always darkest before it goes completely black, so

Mary Louise Kelly

We miss him every day.

Antony J. Blinken

If you, if you keep that in mind, it's, it's, it's not bad guidance for the work that we're all trying to do. But look, there's some fundamental realities that we can't escape. The fundamental values of these between Gaza and the West Bank, there are somewhere over 5 million Palestinians. There are about 7 million Israeli Jews. Neither is going anywhere. Palestinians are not going anywhere. The Jews are not going anywhere. There has to be an accommodation, but an accommodation that does two things, that brings lasting peace and lasting security to Israelis who so desperately want it and need it, and fulfills the right

*****Note that this is an automated transcription and may contain inaccuracies. Please refer to the [original YouTube recording](#) as well*****

self determination of the Palestinians. Now, with any right comes responsibility, responsibility to build a state that would not be a threat to Israel, that won't be hamastan, that won't be like Lebanon, with Hezbollah actually dominating the country. So they're important things that would need to happen in order for a state to be realized. But I believe strongly that, yes, that has to be the future. And by the way, the two strongest opponents of a two state solution. Who are they, Iran and Hamas. So the strongest possible rebuke to both Iran and Hamas would be the realization of two states at every step along the way in the history of this you go back to the Oslo Accords. Who tried to disrupt the Oslo Accords, Hamas, when the Arabs launched the Arab Peace Initiative, and we're moving toward recognition of Israel, who unfortunately, effectively disrupted that Hamas with one of the most horrific terrorist attacks before October 7 that we've seen in Israel. So if you look at the logic of this, it's compelling, and there's something else, and I'm sorry for going on, but I think it's important there is a different future, and we saw it. We've seen its outlines in an almost embryonic form, but it's there a different future for Israel that realizes maybe its number one objective since the founding of the state, and that is its acceptance in the region, having normal relations with all of its neighbors. We see that through the work that we're doing on normalization, we saw that when Iran attacked Israel, and for the first time, a direct attack from Iran on Israel the United States, but not just the United States, European countries and countries in the region came to Israel's defense. So we can see a future where Israel is integrated in the region. It's more secure. The Palestinians realize their aspirations for a state, and the enemies of that future, Iran and its various proxies are isolated.

Speaker 1

Thank you for making the case for Hope Iran. You mentioned stay there. They just held presidential elections of their own. What opportunities do you see with this new reformist president? President Pezeshkian.

Antony J. Blinken

Well, I think we'll, of course look to see what policies Iran pursues. But the reality is, the bottom line is, the Supreme Leader continues to call the shots, so I can't say that we have any great expectations, but let's see what he and his team actually do once they're in office. As you know, when this administration came in, we tried to pursue again, nuclear diplomacy with Iran, because if you can at least take one problem off the board, which is Iran potentially with a nuclear weapon, that's inherently a good thing we had, as you know well, an agreement reached during the Obama administration that actually put Iran's nuclear program in a box. And one of the biggest mistakes that we've made in recent years was throwing out that agreement and allowing Iran to get out of the box that we put it in. So we were testing the proposition about whether we could at least recreate something that looked like that

Mary Louise Kelly

Every time, every time I've interviewed you as Secretary, I have asked you the same question, is US policy still that Iran must not be allowed to get a nuclear it is, which is what you always answer, and then I always ask, So, how are you going to stop them? How are you going to stop them?

*****Note that this is an automated transcription and may contain inaccuracies. Please refer to the [original YouTube recording](#) as well*****

Antony J. Blinken

Well, there by far the preferable way to do it would be through diplomacy. Where we are now is not in a good place Iran, because the nuclear agreement was thrown out, instead of being at least a year away from having the breakout capacity producing fissile material for a nuclear weapon is now probably one or two weeks away from doing that. Now they haven't developed a weapon itself, one or two weeks. One or two weeks is probably what the realistic breakout time is. They are. They haven't produced a weapon itself, but that's something, of course, that we track very, very carefully. And you put those two things together, the fissile material, an explosive device, and you have a nuclear weapon. So we're focused on that. What we've seen in the last weeks and months is Iran that's actually moving forward with this program. So the first thing we need to see if Iran is serious about engaging is actually pulling back on the work that it's doing on its program. Second, we, of course, have been maximizing pressure on Iran across the board. We've imposed more than 600 sanctions on Iranian persons, entities, one kind or another. We haven't lifted a single sanction, and we have much closer coordination now.

Mary Louise Kelly

My question though, you're, you're applying every tool in the toolkit, and yet you just told us they are moving forward.

Antony J. Blinken

Well, they're, they're, they're moving forward in terms of the capacity to break out in producing fissile material. We're looking very carefully at anything they might be doing on weaponization, but it's important here as well to make sure that in doing this, we're acting in close concert with partners in Europe, in the region, and we've built that kind of approach in ways that we didn't have a few years ago.

Mary Louise Kelly

Ukraine. I'll start with the cause for hope. NATO has recently expanded military support. A lot of the ammunition shortages have been addressed. Dozens of F 16 fighter jets are on their way to Ukraine. They're expected to be operational this summer. How do you ensure that US aid to Ukraine continues if there is a change in the White House, or to put it more bluntly, how do you Trump proof it to Ukraine?

Antony J. Blinken

Well, I think it's important to note two things first, and it's always important to start here. Vladimir Putin has already failed. He's failed in the objective he set, which was to erase Ukraine from the map, to end its existence as an independent state to subsume it into a greater Russia that has failed and it cannot succeed. Now, the measure of success for Ukraine, Given Russia's failure, and, of course, so many other losses that came with that, the fact that for Russia now, it's lost its energy market in Europe, it's facing a NATO that is stronger and larger than it's ever been, and no one could have imagined three years ago that Finland and Sweden would become part of members of NATO across the board, virtually everything is a strategic matter that Putin has sought to prevent. He's precipitated by his actions. The question now is, what constitutes success for Ukraine going forward. And I think the answer is straightforward, it's a Ukraine that is strong, that's independent, that's increasingly integrated with the West, and it stands on

*****Note that this is an automated transcription and may contain inaccuracies. Please refer to the [original YouTube recording](#) as well*****

its own feet, militarily, economically, democratically. And we have Ukraine on that trajectory, even as we're working to do everything we can to make sure that it has what it needs to deal with the ongoing Russian aggression. We're also helping Ukraine build this plan program for the future. Now, a lot has already gone into that, and yes, it will continue to need resources, but I think if people look at the logic of this, we've seen a strong bipartisan majority in both houses of Congress for supporting Ukraine. I believe that support is still there. Any administration, I think, will take account of that, and any administration has to ask hard questions. If we stop, if we reverse ourselves, if we let Ukraine down, what will Putin do? He will then really resume the aggression and possibly have a chance of succeeding where, for now, he's failed. He won't stop at Ukraine. He's likely to go with other countries in the in the region, including NATO allies and other would be aggressors, far afield from Ukraine, far afield from Europe. They're taking lessons from this too.

Mary Louise Kelly

My question again, is there anything you can do to try to lock in now in July 2024 to ensure that the US continues to honor the obligations and commitments it has made, no matter who is running things a year from now?

Antony J. Blinken

So we've done a number of things, and look, every administration has an opportunity, of course, to set its own policies. We can't lock in the future, but just a week ago, at the NATO summit, we had more than 20 countries come together on the margins of the summit to announce that they had negotiated and signed 10 year bilateral security agreements with Ukraine, and that means that all of these countries, including the United States, have committed to help Ukraine for the next decade. Build up its deterrent capacity, build up its defenses. Now, if we were to renege on that, I suppose that's possible, but happily, we have another 20 some odd countries, and we're heading to more than 30 that will be doing the same thing. These are long term commitments to Ukraine.

Mary Louise Kelly

I want to ask about what it would take for the US to change its policy on how far Ukraine can shoot weapons into Russia. And I'm drawing for that question. I reached out to colleagues in our Kyiv Bureau, including Ukrainian colleagues. I was curious what they would want to ask you. They want to know, does Washington want Ukraine to win or not?

Antony J. Blinken

I think if you look at the last two and a half years, it's hard to conclude that anyone has done more for Ukraine to assure its success than the United States of America, and that will continue for as long as we have anything to say about it. Now,

Mary Louise Kelly

That is true, but they would point out they're being asked to fight with one hand tied behind their

*****Note that this is an automated transcription and may contain inaccuracies. Please refer to the [original YouTube recording](#) as well*****

Antony J. Blinken

Every step along the way. We've tried to make sure that we're adapting and adjusting to the realities on the ground, to what's actually happening, to make sure that Ukrainians have what they need when they need it. But often it's not as simple as it seems. Let me give you an example. At various points during these last two and a half years, one weapon system or another has made itself, made its way into the headlines. Maybe it's F 16, which, as you noted, are in the process of being delivered. Maybe it's an Abrams tank, some other system, and there seems to be this binary question, oh, we give it to them or we don't. But it's not as simple as that. It's not enough to give them a weapon system. They have to be able to use it. They have to be able to maintain it. It has to be part of a cohesive strategy. And so as we've done these things, and Lloyd Austin has done an extraordinary job bringing together more than 50 countries in support of Ukraine's defense, but also working through each of these decisions. And again, every step along the way is necessary. We've done more, we've adjusted, we've adapted, and I'm convinced we'll continue to do that.

Mary Louise Kelly

So in this specific question of Ukraine's ability to use the weapons it is it is being given to actually attack the enemy that is attacking them? It sounds like that is a conversation that is ongoing,

Antony J. Blinken

There's always an ongoing conversation,

Mary Louise Kelly

Okay, why not? Why not? Make crystal clear, Ukraine has a place in NATO. Ukraine will get membership in NATO. Put some kind of timeline on it the year, two years, five years, I don't know. But just to make clear to Vladimir Putin, we're calling your bluff.

Antony J. Blinken

We have made that crystal clear. That's exactly what the last two NATO Summit declarations say. Vilnius, Ukraine will become a member of NATO. Conditions allow when all the members agree in this summit, we've talked about the irreversibility of Ukraine's path to NATO, and more than that, I think it's easy to look at the language in a summit declaration and maybe harder to understand what's actually happening in a practical way. We were really determined with this summit to build a bridge to Ukraine's NATO membership. Because, again, you have to do this in a deliberate, methodical way to make sure that any country coming in is prepared to assume the responsibilities of membership, contributes fully to the alliance and meets the various requirements. So this last summit really put in place a bridge for Ukraine to go across. For the first time ever we've stood up a dedicated NATO command whose purpose is basically to help Ukraine cross that bridge. We've never done that before, so I think the direction is clear, and if you're in Moscow,

Mary Louise Kelly

Timeline, is TBD, but after the war,

*****Note that this is an automated transcription and may contain inaccuracies. Please refer to the [original YouTube recording](#) as well*****

Antony J. Blinken

The timeline is based on meeting the various requirements. But I'm convinced that what we put in place will help Ukraine do that quickly.

Mary Louise Kelly

I want to ask about Americans detained in Russia, including Evan Gershkovich of The Wall Street Journal, who was sentenced this morning to 16 years in prison. Also Vladimir Kara Murza, who was awarded the Pulitzer Prize this year for his columns for The Washington Post. How do we bring them home? I

Antony J. Blinken

think you had Roger Carstens here a couple of days ago. Roger his team, every single day, are working to bring unjustly detained Americans home, wherever they're held. And of course, when it comes to Evan, when it comes to Paul Whelan and Russia, other Americans, we're working it quite literally every day, looking to see what we can do to get them home. We've had a rather extraordinary track record over the last three and a half years of doing just that, bringing some 30 Americans home from different places around the world where they were being unjustly detained. All I can tell you is this, we're working it. We're working it as we speak, and we're not going to stop until we get Evan home, Paul Whelan home, till we get others home.

Mary Louise Kelly

Understanding and appreciating that you would not want to get into any details in a public forum of negotiations that may be underway, is Putin and many other bad actors in the world, but let's stick with Putin. Is he just waiting out Biden like why would he cut a deal on Evan Gershkovich now, when it's such a huge bargaining chip for him with the next administration?

Antony J. Blinken

Well, you're right. I'm not going to get into the details. Look any effort to bring any American home is going to be part of a process of back and forth discussion, potentially of negotiation, and depending on what the other side is looking for, they'll reach their own conclusions about whether it meets whatever their needs are, and we can bring someone home, and I don't think that's dependent on an election in the United States or anywhere else.

Mary Louise Kelly

You talked about how Russia, in your view, has already lost that they're facing a bigger, stronger NATO than three years ago. Are US sanctions? Are Western sanctions on Russia working? Can you name for us a single example of where they have prompted Vladimir Putin to behave better?

Antony J. Blinken

I think we make a mistake if we look at the question of whether a sanction succeeded solely on the question of has it immediately changed behavior? Because what we know is this, the sanctions that

*****Note that this is an automated transcription and may contain inaccuracies. Please refer to the [original YouTube recording](#) as well*****

we've been able to impose, and not just us, dozens of countries around the world, in an extraordinary coordinated effort that actually started before the Russian invasion of Ukraine, when we saw it coming, we got prepared, we brought countries together, we planned out what we were going to do, and every and all the months since we have added collectively to the pressure on Russia. But what does that mean in practice? It means that everything that so many countries around the world can do easily, it's much harder for them to do. Everything that we can do cheaply, it's much more costly for them to do and this has a growing powerful weight on Russia's economy and on Russia's future. You have a combination of sanctions, export controls, a brain drain from Russia. At one point, more than a million people had left. Some have gone back. But the ones who have left tend to be the best and the brightest who are contributing to Russia's future, its ability to move forward with critical industries, whether it's defense aerospace, whether it's energy exploration, all of those have a heavier and heavier weight on them. Now it's also true. The Russians have found workarounds, and particularly in their relationship with North Korea, with Iran, and unfortunately, with China, they have found ways to keep the defense industrial base moving so that they can continue to prosecute the aggression against Ukraine. But as I'm looking at it, as I'm looking at Russia's future, if this weight remains imposed on them, that future is harder and darker, and that's not what we want, and it was certainly not what we wanted when we started, but it's a reality that they have imposed upon themselves.

Mary Louise Kelly

Yeah. How are you thinking about that, about the unintended consequence of Russia being driven closer to North Korea, China and Russia? How are you thinking about that axis Alliance, like, what's the term you're using?

Antony J. Blinken

Well, I think we've seen two things. We have seen that although that was something that was in the works for a long time, and maybe some of us accelerated as a result of the war in Ukraine, but we've also seen something else that's been quite remarkable. I've been doing this for more than 30 years. I have not seen a time when there's been greater convergence between the United States and our European partners and our partners in Asia in terms of the approach to Russia, but also in terms of the approach to China than we're seeing right now. We built convergence across the Atlantic, we built it across the Pacific, and we built it between the Atlantic and the Pacific. So I would take our team and the countries that we're working with than anything that Russia has been able to put together. Beyond that, I think they're going to be and we've already seen a lot of strains in these groupings. It's not particularly good for your reputation to be working closely with Russia and helping it perpetuate its war in Ukraine. So I think China is very uncomfortable in the position it's in. But for now, we do have, we do have a challenge, which is China is providing not weapons, unlike North Korea and Iran, but it provided the inputs for Russia's defense industrial base. 70% of the machine tools that Russia's importing come from China. 90% of the microelectronics come from China. And that's going into the defense industrial base and turning into missile turning into missiles and tanks and other weapons. We've called out China on that. We have sanctioned Chinese companies, but more to the point, so have many others, and we just saw that in Europe a couple of weeks ago. And China can't have it both ways. It can't all at once be saying that it's for

*****Note that this is an automated transcription and may contain inaccuracies. Please refer to the [original YouTube recording](#) as well*****

peace in Ukraine when it is helping to fuel the ongoing pursuit of the war by Russia. It can't say that it wants better relations with Europe when it is actually helping to fuel the greatest threat to Europe's security since the end of the Cold War.

Mary Louise Kelly

On China. Last year, on this stage, you talked about your goal of putting stability back in the US China relationship, I think you used the phrase putting a floor under it and trying to make sure that competition doesn't tip into conflict. Have you succeeded?

Antony J. Blinken

I believe we have, when we were last year. I guess it was after an initial trip that that I made to China, and then many of our many of many of my colleagues follow Secretary Yellen, Secretary Raimondo, and we've done a number of things. And of course, President Biden, President Xi in late November in San Francisco. We've done a number of things that are critical. We have restored regular high level engagements between our countries, and that's vitally important, because if you want to avoid any kind of unintended conflict, you've got to start by talking, by communicating, and we've restored that. And there's a steady drumbeat of these engagements, these communications, including restoring, critically, these military to military.

Mary Louise Kelly

How often do you speak to your Chinese counterpart?

Antony J. Blinken

You know, I speak to him on on a fairly regular basis, and I'll be seeing him next week, in fact, in Laos. But that's important. But it's important for two reasons. It's important, first, to make sure that, again, we have clarity and we're not getting into something that's unintended. It's also important because, one, we're able to communicate very clearly on areas where we disagree. So at least China knows where we're coming from just as we know where they're coming from. We have that on the South China Sea. We have that on Taiwan. We have that on overcapacity. Now these are critical, but there's another aspect to this. I'll just mention it quickly. This relationship cannot be put on a bumper sticker, at least if it can be maybe a very long, long bumper sticker, large bumper sticker, because it's the most consequential and the most complex relationship we have. There are aspects of, really competition, which is probably the fundamental way I define it, but also contestation, but also cooperation. And we found places where it's in our mutual interest to actually cooperate, even as we're competing very vigorously for the future and shaping the future. Fentanyl is one of them, single number one killer of Americans between the ages of 18 to 45 40% of Americans know someone who died from an opioid overdose. We've of course, been going at this for a long time and trying to make sure that when it comes to the chemical precursors, the ingredients that go into making fentanyl and that are mostly now manufactured in China for perfectly legal reasons, but then get diverted illegally, come to Mexico, get synthesized into fentanyl, come into the United States. We wanted to make sure that China is actually doing what it needs to do to curb the flow of those precursors. And this is something that President Biden negotiated with President Xi when

*****Note that this is an automated transcription and may contain inaccuracies. Please refer to the [original YouTube recording](#) as well*****

they met in November in San Francisco. We've now seen it's not it's a good start, but it's not enough cooperation. Finally, on doing just that,

Mary Louise Kelly

On Taiwan, China has signaled pretty aggressively. It hates Taiwan's new president. This spring, they mounted bigger than ever military drills simulating a blockade. How worried? Just quick update in this moment. How worried should we be? How worried are you about developments in the Taiwan Strait?

Antony J. Blinken

Well, this too is something, of course, that we're tracking all the time, not just the Taiwan Strait, South China Sea. We've seen second time Michelle with the Philippines as well, come up again in the in the news. Look, I think this goes back to the point I was making about convergence a little earlier. One of the things that we've done is in sort of building bridges between Europe and Asia and thinking about the big challenges that we face is raise the recognition, far away from the Taiwan Strait, that if there were to be a crisis over Taiwan, it would be a crisis that affects quite literally everyone in the world, not just the immediate neighbors. 50% of commercial cargo traffic goes through those straits every day. 70% of the semiconductors that the world relies on manufactured in Taiwan. So we've now seen, over the last year, year and a half, a chorus of countries from far afield really impressing about China. The imperative of not having a crisis, not stirring the pot, not disturbing the status quo, preserving peace and stability. The more you have that collective weight on China, I think the more they're likely to not lead us in that direction.

Mary Louise Kelly

Speaking of convergence of connectivity, this huge global outage underway that I think is sabotaging all of our flights out of aspen right now as we speak,

Antony J. Blinken

is that a bad thing?

Mary Louise Kelly

we may all be on your your plan on the way home this afternoon. Current rate, What's your understanding of what happened? And I and I guess the bigger picture, what does it tell us about our vulnerabilities, that a software update can blow out flights worldwide and many other things this morning?

Antony J. Blinken

Well, my best understanding is exactly that there was some kind of glitch in the software update. This was not a to the best of my knowledge, now, a malicious attack of any kind, but look, it does underscore some very basic things. We have to continue to build resilience in our systems. We have to continue to build redundancy. We have to continue to diversify so we're not reliant as best possible, on any single point of failure. That's something we've been very much engaged in. We've been doing that with supply

*****Note that this is an automated transcription and may contain inaccuracies. Please refer to the [original YouTube recording](#) as well*****

chains across the world, building coalitions of countries to make sure that we're coordinating on supply chains, building new ones, and making sure that if we see a problem we can address it immediately,

Mary Louise Kelly

On challenges to our democracy, here at home, I remember interviewing you when you were a baby Secretary of State, February 2021, you just started the job, and you were speaking about the importance of advancing American values worldwide. And I asked you, is that harder when our values are under siege here at home, which sadly feels like a very relevant question. Again, when you speak with your foreign counterparts, are they worried about instability here at home leading to instability everywhere?

Antony J. Blinken

Well, first, I think many of our friends and partners share the horror that I think every American felt at the attack on former President Trump, at the attempted assassination, at the killing of a incredible family man who lost his life trying to protect his family. And for Americans, you know, we say that political violence is unacceptable, and of course it is, but it's also been a threat in our history, as everyone knows all too well, and something that each and every time you hope is the last time that we see it. But for me, going around the world and talking to people about this, I think the greatest strength that we bring to a crisis of this kind to an attack on our democracy at home, even to the divisions that we have at home, which are real, which are profound, is the way we approach them, is what we actually do in response. And the hallmark of this country heretofore, has always been to confront our challenges, to confront our differences, openly, transparently, not to pretend they don't exist, not to sweep them under the rug, but to engage them even when it's ugly, even when it's incredibly painful. And that's something that continues to set us apart. Most other countries don't actually do that. So I believe strongly that as long as we continue to do that, including in the wake of something as horrific as what happened a week ago. Actually, it's a demonstration of the resilience of our democracy, the resilience of our values, and the importance of openness, of transparency, of a willingness to confront our own demons, our own problems.

Mary Louise Kelly

But is that the way the thank you, yes. Is that the way the foreign leaders you are interacting with see it? I'm imagining you must get some pretty tough questions about things like an attempted assassination, the apparent inability of our secret service to prevent that. Attempt, since the things are out of control in the US, I mean, that must have some impact on America's ability to lead and wield influence on all kinds of things.

Antony J. Blinken

Again, I really think it's all in the response, and that's that's an ongoing matter. Let's see where the facts take us. Let's make sure we understand exactly what happened. Let's see what we do in response to that, and let's focus on the way that we do it. If we can continue to do this together, as has been the case in the past, even with the arguments, even with the divisions, look every single time, up today, up to now, even when we've had these terrible moments in our history, we have managed to emerge on the

*****Note that this is an automated transcription and may contain inaccuracies. Please refer to the [original YouTube recording](#) as well*****

other side, and usually stronger and better off. Now it's no guarantee for the future, but again, I feel strongly, as long as we continue to confront these challenges directly, openly, transparently, we'll get through.

Mary Louise Kelly

A question that I put to Bill Burns on this stage last year, that I want to put to you, what should we be focused on that we are not I've just asked you about the Middle East and Russia and Ukraine. And is there a place, an issue, a country, a person that journalists should ask you about, and we don't?

Antony J. Blinken

Well, you know, if I gave you an answer that question, that would mean that I'm sort of tipping you off to a real problem we have that we don't want to talk about because the answer is too complicated, and then I get myself in trouble, go ahead and tip us out nonetheless. No, I think, look, most of the challenges are readily apparent, and there's some places that are not getting the attention that they probably deserve, because there's only so much that people can digest. Sudan right now is probably the worst humanitarian crisis in the world, and yet it's not getting the attention it deserves. It is from from our administration. We're intensely focused on it more to come in the days and weeks ahead, but just in the last three years, we've worked hard to reorganize our own my own department, State Department, to make sure that it was actually fit for purpose, for the world that we're living in now, not the world that the State Department was dealing with for the previous 50 years. We stood up a new bureau on global health to make sure that we're prepared and working to prevent and is necessary to deal with the next pandemic. We stood up a bureau on cyber policy, digital policy, emerging technology, to make sure that the United States is at the forefront in helping to define, to shape the rules, the norms, the standards by which all of this technology is going to be used. We stood up a China house. We have something called the Global Engagement Center, which is focused on a front in the current great power competition that is maybe the most intense, one of the most important, but of course, is something that doesn't get the focus that it might deserve from all of us, and that's the information front to make sure that we're effectively as best we can dealing with misinformation, dealing with this information, we now have agreements with nearly 20 countries to work collaboratively on doing just that, and then we have to look at what the world's going to look like going forward. We're heading over the next 20 or 30 years for peak population, and we're going to see declining populations around the world. Our basic model of economic growth is in jeopardy because we're going to have fewer productive workers. We're going to have an older population. We're going to have fewer people being able to produce things in our factories, fewer people able to buy things. Now, it may be that all of the extraordinary technology that's coming forward will lead to extraordinary increases in productivity and be able to overcome that, but we have an emerging gap, a gap that's going growing wider between the number of people who are coming on to employment age around the world and the number of jobs that are available for those people. These are the kinds of things that we have to be very, very mindful of. And I'll give you one other example, if you're looking at how governments are responding to aging populations in so many of our democracies, understandably, they're doing what any democratic country would do, and even non democratic countries, they're devoting resources to that population, that segment of the population. It means

*****Note that this is an automated transcription and may contain inaccuracies. Please refer to the [original YouTube recording](#) as well*****

they're taking resources away from younger generations, and younger generations in that way, are losing political power relative to older generations, and to the extent they believe that working through the democratic process, they will not be able to achieve what they want. In trying to provide support, help for their lives, for their futures, they may start to look at doing other things. This is where populism becomes incredibly appealing. This is something that we have to be very cognizant about around the world.

Mary Louise Kelly

Speaking of the younger generation, last question, we have a terrific program here rising leaders.

Antony J. Blinken

I met with the group yesterday, by the way, when I met with him, I said, if you're rising leaders, I guess that makes me a descending leader.

Mary Louise Kelly

You may have shared this with them. If so, share it with the rest of us. Hit us with your best piece of advice. What do you wish 25 year old Tony Blinken had known,

Antony J. Blinken

I guess my maybe my best piece of advice, I don't best piece of advice, but certainly, what I what I'd share is this, as I've had the great privilege and fortune of being able to go around the world these last three and a half years on behalf of the United States, and as we've confronted so many challenges and As an American citizen, as I look at our own country, I think that the most potent poison in our Commonwealth is dehumanization, the inability to see the humanity in someone else. And when that sets in, everything good becomes so much harder. Everything bad becomes so much more possible. So my biggest piece of advice to anyone who's engaged in public policy, anyone who's engaged in a debate about any policy, is focus on the humanity of the person on the other side of the table, understand where they're coming from, what they're all about, what their aspirations are, recognize how much we actually have in common underneath all of these differences, if we put the focus there, if we end or minimize the terrible dehumanization that we see in so many places around the world, then I'm more than convinced. I know that the best of humanity is not only possible. Is what will happen if we see if we fail, if we don't do that, then what is a very dangerous world is going to get a lot more dangerous, and what is divided societies in so many places will become even more divided, and that will be a loss for everyone. But I've seen these bridges being built in so many places that I go to, I've met so many people who are doing that every single day, that are people who are finding the humanity in the other so to me, that's our most important challenge.

Mary Louise Kelly

Thank you. I want to thank Aspen. I want to thank Aspen, for giving us a forum for these questions, and I want to thank you, Secretary Blinken, for fielding them. Thank you very much. Thank you.

*****Note that this is an automated transcription and may contain inaccuracies. Please refer to the [original YouTube recording](#) as well*****