DEPUTY SECRETARY BLINKEN

TESTIMONY ON U.S.-CHINA RELATIONS: STRATEGIC CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

SENATE FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE

APRIL 27, 2016

<http://www.foreign.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/042716_Blinken_Testimony.pdf>

Chairman Corker, Ranking Member Cardin, Senators—thank you for the opportunity to come before you today to discuss our relationship with China. I would also like to recognize this Committee’s leadership on policy in the broader Asia-Pacific region.

Over the last seven years, our rebalance to Asia has helped shape and influence this trajectory by bolstering our alliances, building new partnerships, strengthening regional institutions and rule of law, advancing our economic ties, and engaging deeply with China.

Our intensive engagement in Asia has helped foster an increasingly broadly accepted vision for the future of the region, and for our role in it. A vision wherein countries come to each other’s aid in times of disaster or crisis. Where borders are respected and countries cooperate to prevent small disputes from growing larger. Where disagreements are settled openly, peacefully, and in accordance with the rule of law. Where diversification of trade and investment flows allow countries to pursue their interests freely. And where the human rights of each and every person are fully respected.

This is the environment in which we are advancing our relationship with China. Secretary Kerry has called our relationship with China our “most consequential” relationship. It is crucial that we get it right.

STRENGTHENING REGIONAL STABILITY

We have seen results of this approach in our collaboration on some of the region’s toughest issues, including North Korea and the provocative, destabilizing, and internationally unlawful actions it continues to take to advance its proscribed missile and nuclear programs.

While the United States and China share an interest in ensuring that North Korea does not retain a nuclear weapons capability, we have not always agreed with China on tactics for engaging North Korea.

But in the last few months we have worked together to draft and pass the toughest UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) in a generation to compel the DPRK leadership to rethink its pursuit of nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles. It came about because China increasingly recognizes that North Korea’s actions are the greatest source of instability in the region. At the same time, the United States has made clear it will take whatever steps are necessary to protect itself and its allies and partners—including steps that are not aimed at China but which raise its concern, such as the potential deployment of the THAAD missile defense system to the Republic of Korea.

If fully and effectively implemented, UNSCR 2270 will significantly reduce the North Korean regime’s ability to procure, pay for, or produce weapons of mass destruction. More than any single previous expression of international opprobrium, UNSCR 2270 will challenge the calculus of the leadership in North Korea.

As North Korea’s largest trading partner China has unique leverage in this regard. We welcomed President Xi’s commitment at the Nuclear Security Summit earlier this month to fully implement the UNSCR. It is too early to draw firm conclusions about China’s enforcement, but early trade restrictions that China has imposed suggest China is committed to following through on implementation.

The United States has demonstrated that it is prepared to engage countries with which we have the deepest of differences to advance our national security. The nuclear agreement with Iran is case in point. This was only possible because Iran took concrete steps to freeze, and in some regards roll back its nuclear program, while allowing international inspections, which created the time and space to negotiate the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action—an agreement that, as a practical matter, ensures Iran cannot acquire a nuclear weapon far into the future. China’s commitment to reduce its Iranian oil purchases helped build the economic pressure that brought Iran to the negotiating table, and China continues to contribute to the JCPOA’s implementation, playing a leading role in redesigning and rebuilding the Arak heavy water research reactor.

ENGAGING AND NARROWING OUR DIFFERENCES

Even as we build cooperation with China, we are directly engaging our differences with a goal to resolving or narrowing them while preventing conflict.

This is important, as significant areas of disagreement remain—in particular those concerning China’s assertive and provocative behavior in the South China Sea, its conduct in cyberspace, and its denial of internationally recognized human rights and fundamental freedoms to its citizens, as well as in some cases nationals of other countries.

**John Kirby**

**Spokesperson**  
**Daily Press Briefing**

**Washington, DC**

**April 28, 2016**

[**http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/dpb/2016/04/256700.htm#DPRK**](http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/dpb/2016/04/256700.htm#DPRK)

**QUESTION:** Yeah. North Korea launched two – tested two midrange missiles today.

**QUESTION:** Deputy Secretary Blinken just said – I think it was yesterday; I’m not sure if he repeated it today – but he basically said that sanctions were not working and the day is approaching where – because North Korea’s missile and nuclear program continues unabated, that the day will – as a result, the day is approaching where North Korea will have the capability to launch a nuclear-tipped missile either against the United States or one of its allies. So, I mean, if sanctions aren’t working, what are your other options, either to get them to the table to negotiate something to curb their nuclear ambitions or, if you can’t do that, to do something to prevent a nuclear attack from happening?

**MR KIRBY:** Well, look, we’re focused right now on implementing the new set of sanctions, which are tougher --

**QUESTION:** But he just said they’re not working, though.

**MR KIRBY:** He was referring to sanctions over a long period of time obviously have not dissuaded the regime’s desire to continue to pursue dangerous nuclear capabilities. We’ve just got a new set implemented and we obviously are going to focus on continuing to enforce them. They are stronger than ever before. So sometimes sanctions take a little time to have an effect.

**QUESTION:** Take a long time.

**MR KIRBY:** Sometimes they can take a long time, that’s right. But that doesn’t mean that after just enacting them you throw them out the window because you get another test.

**QUESTION:** I didn’t say throw them out the window, but like, what are --

**MR KIRBY:** We --

**QUESTION:** -- it seems as if maybe the sanctions will work over the long term, but the warnings by both the Chinese president, the deputy secretary of state, military commanders that have spoken over the last several months – I mean, the situation does seem to be getting more grave as the weeks go on.

**MR KIRBY:** Look, we’re certainly – we take the threats that he poses seriously, and we’re going to continue to work with the international community, we’re going to continue to consult with the UN about the best ways forward here. I don’t have specific measures or alternatives to proffer here today for you, nor would I necessarily think wise to do so from the podium. But I can tell you that we’re going to continue to work with the international community to try to find ways to hold them to account for obviously what appears to be recalcitrance at best in changing their direction.

**QUESTION:** It definitely doesn’t seem that they’re deterred. It seems as if, in fact, since the sanctions have been implemented, they’re increasing their --

**MR KIRBY:** So we need to let the sanctions regime continue to play out, but we also need to continue to explore ways to hold them to account, and we’re going to do that. I just don’t have any specific decisions or alternatives to speak to today.

**QUESTION:** So President Xi Jinping in China said that, “As a close neighbor of the peninsula, we will absolutely not permit war or chaos on the peninsula,” referring to the Korean peninsula, obviously. Do you have a specific comment on that, a response to --

**MR KIRBY:** We don’t want to see war on the peninsula either.

**QUESTION:** And so do you see this as a sign that China is going to be taking stronger measures against North Korea?

**MR KIRBY:** We certainly hope that China will use its significant influence and its leadership in the region to help the international community hold the North to account and to work with the international community to that end. That’s what we’ve said all along.

**QUESTION:** And just a second question: How does State view how well China’s been enforcing the sanctions?

**MR KIRBY:** Well, again, they’re new, and they’ve just recently been implemented. China signed up to it, and they’ve been clear that because they share a border and because there has been historic commerce between China and the North, that these sanctions would be felt in China. And yet they still signed up and agreed to do it. Our expectation is that they’re going to enforce the sanctions just like we want everybody else to. I’ve seen no indications that they aren’t, in fact, enforcing them.