

U.S SEC. ANTONY BLINKEN WELCOMED GERMAN COUNTERPART ANNALENA BAERBOCK

TALKED OVER RUSSIA & UKRAINE TENSIONS

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USPA NEWS - On December 8, 2021, Annalena Baerbock took over at a handover ceremony in the "Weltsaal" of the Federal Foreign Office, succeeding Heiko Maas. The new head of German diplomacy then underlined her country's attachment "to the European project and to the transatlantic alliance and its multilateral commitments" and immediately began a European displacement. She also insisted on her government's commitment to modernize the country, including with the aim of strengthening the basis for its international role ". Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken, welcomed German Foreign Minister Annalea Baerbock, in Washington, after he reminded their « terrific first meeting in Liverpool » before holding a Joint Press on January 5th. The Secretary and Foreign Minister discussed a range of regional and global challenges, including the risks of further Russian aggression against Ukraine as well as the challenges posed by Iran. Secretary Blinken reiterated that the U.S Administration remains "absolutely determined" to seek diplomatic resolution alongside its European allies, adding that the success of the impending talks with Russia requires a de-escalation from the Kremlin.

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SECRETARY ANTONY J. BLINKEN AND GERMAN FOREIGN MINISTER ANNALENA BAERBOCK AT A JOINT PRESS AVAILABILITY

DC.SECRETARY BLINKEN: Well, good afternoon. Foreign Minister Baerbock, we had a terrific first meeting in Liverpool and it's really a pleasure to welcome you to Washington, to the United States for the first time in your new role as foreign minister.-----

We know that the close relationship between Germany and the United States will continue under Chancellor Scholz and his team. And we're counting on it, because this partnership is indispensable. Together, we maintain and strengthen our mutual security, we defend our shared democratic values around the world, and our countries collaborate, we confer, we strategize, we coordinate on virtually every major issue that affects the lives our people, from COVID to climate to technology and innovation to trade and investment.-----

Our cooperation through institutions like NATO, the OSCE, the UN, the G7 is also critical. Germany just began the G7 presidency and, as I conveyed to Annalena, the United States very much looks forward to the good work that we're going to get done together this year under German leadership, especially on ending COVID-19 and building upon the work that the G7 did in 2021. We also very much commend Germany's role in helping to shape the U.S.-European Union relationship. Together, we're determined and committed to revitalizing that partnership and continuing to raise its ambition, because it is critical to the futures of Americans and Europeans alike. Let me just briefly touch on some of the things that the foreign minister and I talked about today. On Russia, both Germany and the United States see Russia's actions towards Ukraine as an immediate and urgent challenge to peace and stability in Europe. We condemn Russia's military build-up on Ukraine's borders, as well as Moscow's increasingly harsh rhetoric as it continues to push the false narrative that Ukraine seeks to provoke a conflict with Russia. That's a little bit like the fox saying it had no choice but to attack

the hen house because somehow the hens presented a threat to it.-----

What's happening right with Russia's actions towards Ukraine isn't just about Ukraine, as important as that is. It's about some of the most basic principles of international relations that we both share and adhere to – for example, that one country cannot simply change by force the borders of another or dictate the choices another country makes in its foreign policy or with whom it chooses to associate – or seeks to establish a sphere of influence to subjugate its neighbors.

These principles and upholding them are necessary to preserve peace and security, and we cannot and will not allow them to be violated with impunity. That's something that Germany and the United States believe strongly, and our countries are steadfast in our support for Ukraine's independence, its territorial integrity, its sovereignty.-----

In the meeting today, the foreign minister and I emphasized our desire and preference to pursue diplomacy and de-escalation to deal with the situation that currently confronts us. We would far prefer a diplomatic path and diplomatic solution to the situation. We will test Russia's willingness to take that path starting next week through the U.S.-Russia Strategic Stability Dialogue, through the NATO-Russia Council, and at the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe. In those three meetings, we expect that Russia will raise some concerns that it has, many of which have already been publicly aired. We will raise our concerns about Russia's destabilizing actions and violations of international norms.-----

Ultimately, if we're to make progress, it's going to be very difficult to do that in the face of continued Russian escalation of its military build-up and rhetoric. But we are committed to following this path and seeing if we can produce results. We're committed to diplomacy. We're committed to supporting Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity and to defending the fundamental rules and norms that undergird peace and prosperity in Europe and throughout the world. And we know Germany shares these commitments.-----

If Russia nonetheless chooses to escalate, we will respond swiftly. The United States, Germany, and our allies and partners, including at NATO, the European Union, the G7, have been very clear that Russia will face massive consequences for renewed aggression against Ukraine.-----

In our joint statement in July, Germany and the United States also agreed to work together to support Ukraine's energy security and to prevent Russia from using energy as a weapon. The foreign minister and I reaffirmed that commitment today. We also discussed the status of the Nord Stream 2 pipeline, which the United States has long opposed. As I said before, this pipeline does not have gas flowing through it at present. And if Russia renews its aggression toward Ukraine, it would certainly be difficult to see gas flowing through it in the future. So some may see Nord Stream 2 as leverage that Russia can use against Europe. In fact, it's leverage for Europe to use against Russia.-----

The foreign minister and I also discussed China. Germany and the United States agree on the importance of transatlantic coordination on China because it poses a significant challenge to our shared values; to the laws, rules, and agreements that foster stability, prosperity, and freedom worldwide. We also agreed that together, we will continue to build, across the board, an affirmative vision for the future because fundamentally, this is about what we're for together, not what we're against.

Having said that, we have immediate concern about the Government of China's attempts to bully Lithuania, a country of fewer than three million people. China is pushing European and American companies to stop building products with components made in Lithuania or risk losing access to the Chinese market, all because Lithuania chose to expand their cooperation with Taiwan.-----

Here again, this isn't just about Lithuania, but about how every country in the world should be able to determine its own foreign policy free from this kind of coercion. And the United States will work with our allies and partners, including Germany, to stand up against intimidation like this from China by strengthening our economic resilience, diversifying our supply chains, and countering all forms of economic blackmail. And we'll continue to stand together against flagrant human rights abuses by the Government of China and advocating for universal human rights around the world.

There is so much more to be said about the work that we're doing together, but in the interest of time, let me leave it there for now. Annalena, thank you again for making this journey at the very beginning of the year to snowy Washington, D.C. We're extremely excited to work with you, with your colleagues in the new German Government, and we fully expect to continue to make real progress together this year and the years ahead on the issues that really matter and make a difference in the lives of our people. Annalena, over to you. Thank you.

FOREIGN MINISTER BAERBOCK: Thank you very much, ladies and gentleman, Dear Minister.

(Via interpreter) Dear Tony, first of all, let me say that I'm delighted that we see each other again, that we're able to meet again after the first personal meeting at the G7 in Liverpool. We had phone calls during – in between at New Year's and Christmas, and I'm glad that we're able to meet despite COVID, despite the difficult situation in your country and my country, and despite the snow here in Washington. For me personally, it is a very important moment indeed. I spent – as a teenager spent an exchange year here in the

United States of America. Although I have to admit that the weather in Florida was a bit better than currently in snowy Washington, but of course, we know snow in Berlin as well.

For me, it was not only important to be here in person, but also against the backdrop of the urgent and pressing security political questions that we're facing at the beginning of this new year, and we have to face at this new year and against the backdrop of Germany assuming the G7 presidency. Allow me to also say that it is not only the global political situation but also the great and special importance that the new government attaches to the transatlantic partnership and transatlantic friendship. And me personally – so for me, it was person – an important matter indeed that we meet in person again here.

As Europeans, we don't have a stronger partner than the United States of America, and you, with your personal commitment and your work, lend a crucial contribution to this in the past years and moments, and I'd like to express my gratitude and thank you for that. For the new government, let me tell you we will continue and will always try to seek the closest possible coordination with you, our partners and friends.-----

And I mentioned it and Tony Blinken also said it as well: This meeting was marked by pressing security political questions, and we intensively dealt with – the situation in the border region between Russia and Ukraine was one of the issues we talked about. For weeks we've been monitoring and observing the situation with great concern, and we've also monitoring and following the Russian activities in this region.-----

The common position of Europeans and the U.S. Government has been made clear on many occasions – bilaterally, but also in multilateral fora – and we reiterated this position and we jointly reiterated that Russian actions and activities come with a clear price tag, and a renewed violation of Ukrainian sovereignty by Russia would have severe consequences. The Russian Government is aware of this position, and the only way out of this crisis is dialogue, and we agree on this: The only way out is dialogue.-----

Germany always was engaged to seek this dialogue in the Normandy format, together with France, but also, increasingly in these days, together within NATO and the OSCE. And you, dear Tony, you also pooled efforts on the various levels in order to get our common message across as best as possible to President Putin and Russia.-----

I am happy that our efforts to de-escalation led to a situation that Russia is willing to resume talks, and we owe deep gratitude to President Biden for his personal commitment, and I deem it to be very, very important that we have these various formats of dialogue – that we have bilateral talks on the one hand, direct talks between your country and my country, between European partners and Russia, but at the same time, that we have talks within the framework of the NATO-Russia Council in Brussels and talks within the framework of the OSCE, and that we seek the path of dialogue, transparency, and openness.

And in our bilateral meeting, we agreed today on the importance of finding a good path forward to finding a solution together for the process of dialogue. Because let me reiterate: There is no alternative to a political solution. This has to be clear to the Russian Government. And it is in this understanding that we, as transatlantic partners, will continue to go into the talks in the coming weeks.-----

It is out of the question – and let me make it very, very clear at this point in time – there cannot be a decision on the security in Europe without Europe. It is crucial for me, and pivotal, to involve the partners in Europe which are affected. And I thank you, Tony, for the exchange– on this point and our understanding.-----

Aside of Ukraine and Russia, we also talked about how to deal with China. This is a fixed item on our talks in the past days and weeks. This has been on our agenda. For us, it is clear that crucial global questions, challenges, such as the climate crisis or the pandemic, can only be tackled in cooperation together with China. At the same time, we have to defend our values in a steadfast fashion and defend these values. As new German Government, we focus on the joint China policy and we focus on a close coordination between the EU and the USA, and we deem it to be pivotal and crucial.

Other countries have marriages of convenience and/or alliances of conveniences or satellite states, but we are more than that. We are friends and partners that share the same values, and we have to live these values.-----

Also, we are pulling in the same direction when it comes to Iran and the JCPOA. The discussions and negotiations in Iran are entering a crucial phase. Iran has squandered a lot of trust and there is not much time, but we intensively use this time together in Vienna. Tony, dear team, once again, a very – thank you so much for welcoming us so warmly here in Washington, and I'm looking forward to coming back, coming back to this beautiful country. It is important to me to come back soon and not just visit Washington, continue our talks here, but also hold discussions and talks with people in this country in various places. And I am looking forward to tackling the difficult situation on both sides of the Atlantic, tackling the difficult situation for the peoples of our countries. Thank you so much for this meeting indeed.

MR PRICE: We'll turn to questions, alternating between the U.S. and German side. The first U.S. question goes to Missy Ryan of The Washington Post. Missy, if you could unmute yourself and ask your question, please.-----

QUESTION: Thanks, Ned. First question is for Secretary Blinken on the Russia-Ukraine situation. Mr. Secretary, the Russian Government has emphasized that a deal must be struck quickly, but at best, next week's negotiations seem likely to result in an agreement on future talks or some sort of broad framework. Are you concerned these discussions will not move fast enough to head

off a Russian invasion? And in addition, given that Russia appears to want to deal primarily with the United States on a range of issues affecting NATO and the U.S. wants to limit bilateral talks to bilateral matters, what are your expectation for any sort of breakthrough?-----

And then for Madam Foreign Minister, on China's relations with Europe, which you referenced in your opening remarks, do you believe that genocide is occurring in China's Xinjiang region? And will you press for an EU-wide ban on goods from there? And what do you believe Germany and the EU can do to support Lithuania in its rift with Beijing? Thank you.

SECRETARY BLINKEN: I'm happy to start. Missy, thanks very much, and good to see you virtually and Happy New Year. Couple things. First, we have been very clear, the United States and Europe together. We have laid out two paths for President Putin and for Russia: the path of diplomacy and de-escalation, and the path of deterrence, including the serious costs, the massive consequences that Russia would incur if it renews its aggression against Ukraine. And we are now in the process – the starting process – of testing whether this path of diplomacy and de-escalation can bear fruit. And that depends very much on whether Russia is truly willing to engage it.-----

We have coming up next week conversations with Russia bilaterally between the United States and Russia through something that was established last year, the Strategic Stability Dialogue. This came out of the extension of the New START agreement to look at ways that Russia and the United States could continue to pursue arms control, but we're going to have a special session of that dialogue to deal with some of the issues of concern that Russia has raised as well as issues of concern that the United States has. But at the same time, we are pursuing a conversation with Russia through the NATO-Russia Council as well as at the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe that the United States, Russia, all of our European partners – Ukraine and others – are part of.-----

And this gets at the fundamental point that President Biden has made absolutely clear to President Putin: When it comes to questions of European security, there is going to be nothing about Europe without Europe, not just full coordination, full consultation, but participation as well. And that is the basis upon which we're proceeding and we'll continue to proceed. There are some issues that rightfully fit within the Strategic Stability Dialogue between the United States and Russia because they go to arms control between our countries, but many of the other issues that Russia has raised and that we – the United States and Europe – will raise rightly fit in the province of NATO and Russia or, more broadly, the OSCE, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe.-----

I believe that if Russia is serious about pursuing diplomacy and de-escalation that there are things that all of us can do relatively quickly to build greater confidence and to reduce some of the concerns that we have. There are also issues that could be on the table that would take some time to work through, particularly, for example, when it comes to arms control. You don't come up with an arms control agreement in a matter of weeks.

So the real question is whether Russia is serious about diplomacy, serious about de-escalation. It's important that we begin these conversations. I think if they're going to bear fruit, if they're going to show real progress, that will require de-escalation. It's very hard to make actual progress in any of these areas in an atmosphere of escalation and threat with a gun pointed to Ukraine's head. So let's see where this goes over the next weeks. Again, I think we're together – as well as with our allies and partners in Europe – absolutely committed to pursuing diplomacy and de-escalation, just as we are committed to standing up for the principles that are at risk and for Ukraine's sovereignty, independence, and territorial integrity.

FOREIGN MINISTER BAERBOCK: Thank you for your question. With regard to China (inaudible). (Via interpreter) It is crucial that we speak with one voice here and clearly call human rights violations by their name, and that these violations are investigated. And the German federal government supports the proposals that were made in Europe, and that we see here in the United States here as well, that products hailing from forced labor, resulting from grievous human rights violations, that these products cannot enter the European market. And the same holds true when it comes to solidarity for Lithuania. We as Europeans stand in solidarity at Lithuania's side.

MODERATOR: (Via interpreter) Daniella Vates, RedaktionsNetzwerk Deutschland. She will ask a question.

QUESTION: (Via interpreter) Well, good afternoon. I hope you can hear me. I have a question pertaining to Russia-Ukraine. I have a question to you both, Secretary of State and Madam Minister. At what point can we talk about a success, success of outcome of these talks? And where – what kind of sanctions do you discuss? What does – what importance do you attach to the swift decoupling? And on the other hand, Ukraine demands weapons from allies. Mr. Blinken, should Germany fulfill these requirements or is this going to exacerbate this conflict?-----

SECRETARY BLINKEN: I'm sorry, could you repeat the last part of that? Because the translation kicked out for just 10 seconds. If you could repeat the very last part, I'd appreciate it.-----

QUESTION: (Via interpreter) I'm going to repeat. The last question was pertaining to arms that Ukraine demands – Ukraine demands the furnishment, the supply of weapons. Would you, Mr. Blinken, say that Germany should supply Ukraine with weapons or would this exacerbate the conflict?-----

FOREIGN MINISTER BAERBOCK: (Via interpreter) Thank you very much for your question. In light of the situation at the Ukrainian-Russian border, we made it clear: Yes, a further military escalation and a violation of the sovereignty of Ukraine would entail enormous economic consequences, and this also affects the financial sector, and we're in close coordination and exchange. And at this point, I want to reiterate that in my meeting, I underlined the joint declaration with the U.S. Government where both countries agreed that there should be effective measures should Russia weaponize energy. We do not only fully support this, but also this, of course, applies to the new federal government.-----

The question that was directed to Tony Blinken, allow me to make it very clear and reiterate that given our own position, we have a different position on arms supply to Ukraine, but since 2014 we have helped Ukraine and supported Ukraine in building a military hospital. We furnished medical equipment. We supplied material. Also, the federal armed forces, the Bundeswehr, is lending a helping hand when it comes to medical treatment of wounded Ukrainian soldiers on the ground. And we also helped treat affected and wounded soldiers and civilians, and we flew them to Germany.-----

SECRETARY BLINKEN: And thank you for the question. We – we've been working very intensely for some weeks now with allies and partners, including through the G7, NATO, the European Union, indirectly with the European Union, on elaborating, establishing, coordinating potential sanctions if there is renewed Russian aggression against Ukraine. And we've been repeatedly clear about what Russia will face if it renews that aggression. We've been very clear that we'll respond with very strong economic measures, including measures that have not been used in the past or previous episodes of Russian aggression that will inflict very significant costs on Russia's economy and financial system. And that includes, again, powerful sanctions that we did not pursue, for example, in 2014 when Russia first invaded Ukraine.

And this is not just the position of the United States and Germany; it's the collective position of many countries, allies, and partners that have come together in different groupings. I would refer you to the conclusions, for example, from the European Council's December 16th meeting, which stated – and I quote: "Any further military aggression against Ukraine will have massive consequences and severe cost in response, including restrictive measures coordinated with partners." That was the European Council.-----

The North Atlantic Council at NATO, that same day, in its statement made clear that any further aggression against Ukraine would have massive consequences and carry a very high price. And the G7 foreign ministers, where we were together a few days before that in December, also made clear, again, and I quote, "that any use of force to change borders is strictly prohibited under international law. Russia should be in no doubt that further military aggression against Ukraine would have massive consequences and severe costs in response."-----

So I don't think we can be much clearer than that, and we've been working in great detail to elaborate those potential sanctions and other measures. When it comes to security assistance to Ukraine, let me just say a couple of things. We have – we are regularly evaluating the assistance that would be necessary and helpful to Ukraine to defend itself – to defend itself – and will continue to deliver equipment and supplies to Ukraine in the weeks and months ahead through a range of mechanisms, including the Ukraine Security Assistance Initiative and other means as needed. President Biden told President Putin that, again, should Russia further invade Ukraine, we'll provide additional defensive material to Ukrainians above and beyond that which we are already in the process of providing. So this has been a continuous effort – again, not as a threat to Russia, but in defense of Ukraine because of the threat that Russia poses to Ukraine.

MR PRICE: We'll turn to Nick Schiffrin of PBS. Nick, please unmute yourself and go ahead.-----

QUESTION: Thanks very much. Mr. Secretary, Russia has made its requests public. You've said you won't negotiate in public, but are you coming into next week's meetings with specific counterproposals that you expect to negotiate, and will you present them? And on Nord Stream, you reiterated today it'd be difficult to see gas flowing through Nord Stream in the event of an invasion, but Chancellor Scholz has not used the same language. Are you and the new German coalition united on Nord Stream 2?-----

Which brings me to Madam Minister. Chancellor Scholz has reiterated Nord Stream 2 is an economic project under technical review. Personally, of course, you campaigned against it. So will Nord Stream be suspended in the event of invasion, as Toria Nuland in fact testified to Congress? And German press recently reported Chancellor Scholz is seeking a, quote, "new start" with Russia. Is a new start wise with 100,000 Russian troops on Ukraine's border? Thanks very much.

SECRETARY BLINKEN: Thanks very much, Nick, and again, good to see you as well, and Happy New Year to you, too. Yes, Russia has raised issues of European security in its public statements and the documents that it put forward. But let's be very, very clear about this: NATO did not invade Ukraine; NATO did not invade Georgia; NATO did not position forces in Moldova against the will of its people. Those are all things, among many others, that Russia has done in recent years.

Over the past two decades, it is Russia that has invaded neighboring countries; interfered in other countries' elections; used chemical weapons to attempt to assassinate opponents of the government, and done so on foreign soil; violated international arms control agreements; pulled back from confidence-building and transparency measures long agreed. And so we and our allies will absolutely be raising these and other issues with Russia in the days and weeks ahead.-----

Russia has concerns. We will listen. We have concerns, and it's imperative that Russia listen. And I hope – again, as I said before –

that we can find ways diplomatically through these conversations, both bilaterally between the NATO-Russia Council and the OSCE, to actually make progress. And of course there is the ongoing military occupation in Ukraine that has to be dealt with. There's a process for that too, the Minsk process. And there are many steps elaborated a long time ago that, if taken, would resolve that peacefully and restore sovereignty to Ukraine in eastern Ukraine. We very much support that process. We support the work that Germany and France are trying to do to bring Ukraine and Russia together to advance it. And we'll do whatever we can to facilitate that in the weeks and months ahead.-----

On Nord Stream 2, I'll let Annalena address that. I think our position on the pipeline is very well-known. Germany and the United States also have an important agreement that we reached this past summer when it comes to supporting Ukraine's energy security and energy independence. And we are working together, I think effectively, to implement that agreement, including, for example, with starting to establish a green fund that would support green energy projects in Ukraine. With regard to the pipeline itself, as I said, it's not operational, and from our perspective it's very hard to see gas flowing through that pipeline for it to become operational if Russia renews its aggression on Ukraine.

FOREIGN MINISTER BAERBOCK: (Via interpreter) Well, thank you for your question pertaining to Nord Stream 2. In the past, I made very clear statements and the chancellor has made clear statements, and we voiced it differently but we described the same situation. This new government stipulated clearly in the coalition treaty that as far as energy policy projects in Germany are concerned – that holds true for Nord Stream 2 – they stipulated that European energy law applies, so in spirit and in reality. So this is why the Federal Network Agency has suspended certification process. Tony Blinken pointed out to the fact that this is a state where we have means in our hand. At the same time, we made public statements, but also in joint tasks and in joint statements, we made it clear that for this new federal government, for all ministers, for the federal chancellor, we stand by the joint declaration together with the United States – underlines that Nord Stream 2 has geopolitical implications. We agreed on this, together with our European partners, that we take effective measures together with our European partners should Russia use energy as a weapon or should it continue its aggressive acts against Ukraine.

But let me underline the following: At present, every day, every hour, every minute, we are doing everything we can in order to avoid further escalation, further aggressions, and a breach of international and European law. This is our pivotal task as foreign ministers because this has pivotal and crucial significance for Ukraine, and at the same time – and this is a component of this joint declaration and this is something that has been embarked upon at both sides of the Atlantic – it is important to become more independent when it comes to energy supply as Europeans. But also, when looking to the energy supply of Ukraine, through Ukraine, that we support Ukraine, and we need to support Ukraine to make the transition from a fossil energy supply and a fossil energy supply of Europe, and move towards green energy supply. And this is why we have hydrogen projects and many other energy projects, Germany, but also in close cooperation with our American partners. Between the European Union and the United States of America, we have many plans and projects, and we are going to intensively deal with these projects.

QUESTION: And sorry, my apologies, but on the new start question?

SECRETARY BLINKEN: I'm sorry, can you – would you repeat it, please?

QUESTION: Madam Minister – yeah, Madam Minister, I asked about the chancellor's comments about wanting to create a new start with Russia, and I asked whether that – it was wise to create a new start with 100,000 troops on Ukraine's borders. Thanks.

FOREIGN MINISTER BAERBOCK: Yeah, I'm sorry that I didn't answer this question.

(Via interpreter) Well, having quotes in mind in different newspapers, I also talked about this in a situation where we're facing a geopolitical, geostrategic situation that is different from what it looked like a couple of years ago or five decades ago. It is not – we're not able to use cookie-cutter solutions to today's challenges. And you said – you talked about tens of thousands of soldiers and military buildup after we've seen in 2015 the violation of Ukraine's sovereignty. And this is why right now is the moment in time, and as politicians we formulate things differently, also taking one's own history and policies into consideration. For us, it is clear as Federal Republic of Germany, and we do so in coordination with our European friends and our transatlantic partners and friends. Now is the time, now is the moment in time to react to this situation.

And the situation – the fact that we haven't had any talks within the framework of the NATO-Russia Council – it is important to change that, and this is what the federal chancellor actually meant. To do everything, to use every format possible, even if those formats didn't work in the past. This holds true to the NATO-Russia Council, but also to Normandy format, but also this holds true to the OSCE. We need to use all fora and multinational institutions in order to solve this.

SECRETARY BLINKEN: "New start" – I thought you were referring to the arms control agreement we extended last year. I'm glad that Annalena clarified that too.

MODERATOR: (Via interpreter) Frank Jordans would like to ask the last question, AP.-----

QUESTION: Hello. Thank you all, and I hope you can hear me all right. Mr. Secretary, you talked about the massive consequences and costs if Russia makes any kind of military move on Ukraine, but it sounds from what you've just said that you haven't really reached any kind of agreement on what exactly these consequences would be. Is that right? And do the proposed congressional bills

on Nord Stream 2 threaten U.S.-German unity on Ukraine?-----

(Via interpreter) Madam Minister, you said that, during the G7 presidency of Germany, you want to focus on the threat to democracies from inside and the outside. What's the foreign political dimension? Do you want to address countries such as Russia and China or countries such as the United States play a role when it comes to the spread of conspiracy theories that harm fundamental facts, scientific facts, or values? Thank you.-----

SECRETARY BLINKEN: When it comes to sanctions, as I said a moment ago, the European Union through the council, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization through the NAC, the G7 have all spoken very clearly and very decisively about the massive consequences that Russia would face if it renews aggression against Ukraine. There can and should be no doubt about that. Over the last weeks we've been working very closely together on a bilateral basis with other partner countries, directly with the European Union to go into tremendous detail about what those sanctions would entail, what they would involve. I'm not going to telegraph them publicly, but I can tell you with great confidence that a tremendous amount of work has been done already. There is very strong coordination and collaboration and very strong agreement on measures that would be taken in the event of renewed Russian aggression against Ukraine.-----

As the foreign minister said, our strong preference – all of us – would be to see the path of diplomacy and de-escalation move forward. That depends very much on what Russia chooses to do. We are prepared either way, and we'll continue to work to refine the steps that we have been discussing. But again, I think there should be no doubt – and this has been made very clear in very declarative statements by the European Union, by NATO, by the G7 – about the consequences.

And again, when it comes to Nord Stream 2, we will continue to work in a way that I hope can be effective in dealing with energy issues and challenges, including those posed, in our judgment, by Nord Stream 2, and also in a way that preserves what is so vital, and that is strong transatlantic solidarity. That is the most effective response and the most effective tool that we have in countering Russian aggression.

FOREIGN MINISTER BAERBOCK: (Via interpreter) On the question of G7 and the question of democracies, yes, I'm convinced that we, as biggest and strongest economic nations, we not only play a big economic role in the world and bear responsibility, but we also bear responsibility when it comes to defending, standing up to democracy, the rule of law, fair rules, because economic interests and strong liberal values are not a contradiction in itself. They're two – the same – sides of the same coin, because we've seen what happens when we are faced with a situation that fair competitive rules or freedom of speech, the rule of law are not adhered to, then this has massive economic consequences. Companies have felt this when they didn't get access to global markets, but we've seen this also in the global internal market where we as a community of values are a strong community, a union of values that stand up for a level playing field, the same rules.

But when actors from third countries do not adhere to these common rules, then, of course, this has massive economic consequences, negative consequences for European companies. And this is why we, throughout the course of the G7 presidency, we want to focus on the strengthening of democracy and strengthen the notion that we don't only formulate what we're against, but what we are for, what – that we defend our standards pertaining to the rule of law and a fair economic competition that has two sides for – in my opinion. When working globally, multilaterally, this brings added value to each and every individual country, but also when it comes to strengthening democracy at home. And every country is affected – my country as well, the European Union as well.-----

We see tendencies at home to undermine governmental institution, to spread disinformation, and to infringe upon and question fundamental civil liberties. But by cooperating as liberal democracies in multilateral fora, we can show that this improves the situation in the countries at home. The best example is the fight against the pandemic. Fighting the pandemic and joint efforts in fighting the pandemic was a topic we addressed today. This would one of – would be one of the examples which could serve to illustrate that liberal democracies respect civil rights and that authoritarian regimes are not better or effective or faster when it comes to fighting pandemics. Also against the backdrop of tomorrow's day, tomorrow's anniversary here in the United States, but we've also seen protests in Germany where we've seen hate speech and incitement. We need to focus on strengthening our fundamental values and condemn hate speech and incitement online. And the U.S. administration at the beginning of the term put forward a proposal together with Europe when it comes to combating hate and incitement to violence online, and this is something that we want to actually tackle in the coming months.

Thank you. All the best." Source : US. State of Department

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