Beat: Politics

US SEC BLINKEN & MEET AND GREET WITH EMBASSY JERUSALEM STAFF

NEARLY 1500 PERSONS

Paris, Washington DC, 27.05.2021, 16:37 Time

USPA NEWS - US Secretary Antony J. Blinken undertook a trip to Jerusalem, Ramallah, Cairo, and Amman May 24-27, 2021, at the request of President Biden. He first travel to Jerusalem, where he met with Israeli President Reuven Rivlin, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, Foreign Minister Gabi Ashkenazi, and other senior Israeli officials. In Ramallah, he met with Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas, Prime Minister Mohammad Shtayyeh, and other senior officials from the Palestinian Authority. Secretary Blinken will then travel to Cairo to meet with President Abdel Fattah Al Sisi and Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry. The Secretary will conclude his trip with a stop in Amman to meet with His Majesty King Abdullah II of Jordan and Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Ayman Safadi. We publish the full text of the first exchange of US Secretary, Antony Blinken, with the Jerusalem Embassy's staff. Source: Antony J. Blinken, Secretary of State, US State of Department.

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Antony J. Blinken, Secretary of State, Jerusalem, Israel, at Embassy Jerusalem, 05/25/2021 09:22 AM EDT
« MR SHRIER: We have – we are honored with a very special guest, Secretary of State Antony Blinken, and I just want to say in introduction, sir, that you're looking at a very small part of our embassy staff of nearly 1,500 persons. And when I look at our staff, what I see is hope – hope because we have a wide diversity of people represented in our embassy staff. Of course, you have the Americans, who themselves represent the diverse parts of American society. But we also see hope here because we see Israelis, we see – from all sorts of communities, including Arab citizens of Israel, Jewish citizens of Israel of various backgrounds. And we also see Palestinians from the West Bank, we see East Jerusalemites, and you met two of our Gaza-based staff. So you see a diverse community working together for the benefit of U.S. relations with Israel and with the Palestinian Authority. And so that is what gives me hope. And with that, sir, I give you the crowd.
SECRETARY BLINKEN: Thank you. (Applause.) Jonathan, thank you. Thank you so much, not just for the remarks today, but for what you've been doing every day, your leadership in a rather challenging time – maybe it's always a challenging time, but this one in particular is – and we are grateful for that. And it is wonderful to be with all of you today, and thank you for literally a warm welcome, very much appreciate that.
I really wanted an opportunity, even during this very short trip, to get a chance to visit with some of you in person, and to say very simply thank you. Thank you on behalf of the United States for serving so capably under such challenging circumstances in what is one of our most important missions in the world. You know what you feel it, the eyes of the world are often on you, and they certainly have been the last couple of weeks. And with that, you are still doing your work with remarkable skill, remarkable dedication, remarkable courage through all kinds of disruptions.
Three years ago, the embassy moved from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. A year later, the consulate and embassy merged. Last year, the pandemic. And of course, the recent hostilities that you have lived through and worked through. Through all of this, through all of these challenges, you've kept going. This entire community has kept going, carrying out day-to-day responsibilities, solving problems literally on the fly, being a resource, being a mainstay for more than 600,000 American citizens who live in Israel, the West Bank, and Gaza.----------
I'm here as the head of the State Department, but I really want to applaud everyone who is part of this community from so many other U.S. agencies, whether you work for the Department of Defense, Commerce, Justice, Homeland Security, USAID, the Social Security Administration, the U.S. Security Coordinator, or any other agency that's part of this community. Again, on behalf of the President, the Vice President, thank you for everything you do to make this mission work so well.----------
And as Jonathan mentioned, I also want to say a special thanks to our colleagues who are part of the locally employed staff. I know from the many embassies I've had an opportunity to visit with over many years that the lifeblood of any of our missions is the locally employed staff, more than a thousand of our team here. And it is extraordinary to think of what so many of our locally employed colleagues have endured. I heard firsthand some of the stories from some of your colleagues. I just met with several who had experienced the recent violence in Gaza, outside of Gaza in Israel, successfully evacuated but also with powerful stories about what they had experienced, what their families had experienced. And as I said to them, this is such an important reminder to all of us who have any responsibility for policy, because one of the things it's easy to forget is the impact of what you're doing on real lives, and that what this comes down to – everything we're doing every single day, everything you're doing every single day, is going to have an impact on a father, a mother, a son, a daughter, a sister, a brother, an aunt, an uncle, and hopefully – hopefully, a positive one.

Sometimes this all gets reduced to numbers and statistics. We've heard a lot of numbers and statistics the last few weeks, but we can't lose sight of the profoundly human element of everything that we're doing and that you're doing, and I'm really grateful for that reminder today. And I know that that animates you every single day.----------
I also hope that you'll let your family members know how grateful we are to them, because we know that the sacrifices you're making to serve has an effect on them as well. And again, I know that for literally – probably literally everyone here – the last few weeks have been particularly stressful. And I just want to say as well that nothing is more important to us than your safety and the safety of your loved ones. That is always going to be priority number one.----------
We're trying to do a number of things while we're here just in this short period of time. We have a strong and abiding commitment to Israel and to its security. We have a determination to help as effectively as we can deal with the humanitarian crisis in Gaza and also start to build back. We're determined as well to re-engage with the Palestinian Authority and with the Palestinian people. And mostly, we want to try to make a turn after the last couple of weeks to something that is more positive, that actually starts to improve the lives of people, whether they're Palestinians or Israelis. And none of this is going to be like flipping a switch. There is a lot of hard, sustained work ahead but we're committed to doing that, and it doesn't work without all of you. We want to see a future in which Israelis and Palestinians alike know equal measures of peace, security, justice, and maybe most fundamentally of all, dignity, because that may be one of the most powerful human emotions that binds us all together. And we have to look out for that and look out for each other and respect the dignity of our fellow human beings, whatever – whatever their backgrounds.----------
In a few days, as I think some of you or maybe most of you know, Michael Ratney will join you as your new charge. He served previously as the deputy assistant secretary of state, and working on Israel-Palestinian affairs, and consul general here in Jerusalem. So I think he may be personally known to many of you, and he'll be a great leader. But again, I, Jonathan, want to thank you so much for your remarkable leadership at this time. So I also know, finally, that a lot of work goes into even a very short visit, and this one was on particularly short notice. So to those of you who were working on it, thank you, thank you, thank you. I suspect there were a couple of all-nighters for a few of you, so you're very much entitled to a very, very good wheels-up party which won't be too long to come. But I know this wouldn't happen without you, so thank you. I suspect, though, that we'll be back, so more work to come. And meanwhile, thank you for everything you're doing. And I think we have time for a few questions. » Source: Antony J. Blinken, Secretary of State, US State of Department.

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