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# **Antony Blinken**

Antony John Blinken (born April 16, 1962) is an American government official and diplomat serving as the 71st United States secretary of state since January 26, 2021. He previously served as deputy national security advisor from 2013 to 2015 and deputy secretary of state from 2015 to 2017 under President Barack Obama. [1]

During the Clinton administration, Blinken served in the State Department and in senior positions on the National Security Council from 1994 to 2001. He was a senior fellow at the Center for Strategic and International Studies from 2001 to 2002. He advocated for the 2003 invasion of Iraq while serving as the Democratic Staff Director of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee from 2002 to 2008. [2] He was a foreign policy advisor for Joe Biden's unsuccessful 2008 presidential campaign, before advising the Obama-Biden presidential transition.

From 2009 to 2013, Blinken served as Deputy Assistant to the President and National Security Advisor to the Vice President. He later served as Deputy National Security Advisor from 2013 to 2015 and Deputy Secretary of State from 2015 to 2017. During his tenure in the Obama administration, he helped craft U.S. policy on Afghanistan, Pakistan, and the nuclear program of Iran. [3][4] After leaving government service, Blinken moved into the private sector, co-founding WestExec Advisors, a consulting firm.

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Official portrait, 2021

# 71st United States Secretary of State

#### Incumbent

#### **Assumed office**

January 26, 2021

**President** loe Biden

**Deputy** Wendy Sherman

**Preceded by** Mike Pompeo

# 18th United States Deputy Secretary of State

#### In office

January 9, 2015 - January 20, 2017

President Barack Obama

**Secretary** John Kerry

Preceded by William Joseph Burns

Succeeded by John Sullivan

26th United States Deputy National Security Advisor

#### In office

January 20, 2013 - January 9, 2015

President Barack Obama

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# Early life and education

Blinken was born on April 16, 1962, in Yonkers, New York, to Jewish parents, Judith (Frehm) and Donald M. Blinken, the former United States Ambassador to Hungary. [5][6][7] His maternal grandparents were Hungarian Jews. [8] Blinken's uncle, Alan Blinken, served as the American ambassador to Belgium. [9][10] His paternal grandfather, Maurice Henry Blinken, was an early backer of Israel who studied its economic viability, [11] and his great-grandfather was the author of Yiddish literature Meir Blinken. [12]

Blinken attended the <u>Dalton School</u> in New York City until 1971. [6] He then moved to Paris with his mother Judith and <u>Samuel Pisar</u>, whom she married following her divorce from Donald. Pisar was the lawyer and confidant of British publisher <u>Robert Maxwell</u>. [13][14] In his confirmation hearing, Blinken told the story of his step-father, who was the only Holocaust survivor of the 900 children of his school in Poland. Pisar found refuge in a US tank after making a break into the forest during a Nazi death march. [15][16] In Paris, Blinken attended <u>École</u> Jeannine Manuel. [17]

Preceded by	Denis McDonough	
Succeeded by	Avril Haines	
National Security Advisor to the Vice President of the United States		
In office		
January 20, 2009 – January 20, 2013		
Vice President Joe Biden		
Preceded by	John P. Hannah	
Succeeded by	Jake Sullivan	
Personal details		
Born	Antony John Blinken April 16, 1962 Yonkers, New York, U.S.	
Political party	Democratic	
Spouse(s)	Evan Ryan ( <u>m.</u> 2002)	
Children	2	
Father	Donald M. Blinken	
Relatives	Alan Blinken (uncle) Samuel Pisar (stepfather)	
Education	Harvard University (BA) Columbia University (JD)	

Blinken attended <u>Harvard University</u> from 1980 to 1984, where he majored in social studies and co-edited Harvard's daily student newspaper, <u>The Harvard Crimson</u>. Blinken also wrote a number of articles on current affairs for the <u>Crimson</u>. Blinken worked as an intern for <u>The New Republic</u> for around a year after graduating from Harvard. He entered <u>Columbia Law School</u> in 1985 and earned his <u>J.D.</u> in 1988. After graduation, he practiced law in New York City and Paris. Blinken worked with his father Donald to raise funds for <u>Michael Dukakis</u>, the Democratic nominee in the 1988 United States presidential election.

In his monograph *Ally versus Ally: America, Europe, and the Siberian Pipeline Crisis* (1987), Blinken argued that exerting diplomatic pressure on the <u>Soviet Union</u> during the <u>Siberian pipeline crisis</u> was less significant for American interests than maintaining strong relations between the <u>United States and Europe. [25]</u> *Ally versus Ally* was based on Blinken's undergraduate thesis. [19]

# Early career

#### **Clinton and Bush administrations**

Blinken has held senior foreign policy positions in two administrations over two decades. He was a member of the National Security Council (NSC) staff from 1994 to 2001. From 1994 to 1998, Blinken was Special Assistant to the President and Senior Director for Strategic Planning and NSC Senior Director for Speechwriting. From 1999 to 2001, he was Special Assistant to the President and Senior Director for European and Canadian Affairs.

He supported the U.S.-led <u>invasion of Iraq</u> in 2003. [2][29] In 2002, Blinken was appointed staff director for the <u>Senate Foreign Relations Committee</u>, a position he served in until 2008. [26] Blinken assisted then-Senator Joe Biden, Chair of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, in formulating Biden's support for the U.S. invasion of Iraq, with Blinken characterizing the vote to invade Iraq as "a vote for tough diplomacy". [30]

In the years following the U.S. invasion and occupation of Iraq, Blinken assisted Biden in formulating a proposal in the Senate to establish in Iraq three independent regions divided along ethnic or sectarian lines. The proposal was overwhelmingly rejected at home, as well as in Iraq, where the prime minister opposed the partition plan. [31]

He was also a senior fellow at the <u>Center for Strategic and International Studies</u>. In 2008, Blinken worked for <u>Joe Biden's presidential campaign</u>, and was a member of the <u>Obama–Biden presidential transition team</u>.

#### **Obama administration**

From 2009 to 2013, Blinken was Deputy Assistant to the President and National Security Advisor to the Vice President. In this position he helped craft U.S. policy on Afghanistan, Pakistan, and the nuclear program of Iran. [3][4] Blinken was sworn in as Deputy National Security Advisor, succeeding Denis McDonough, on January 20, 2013.

On November 7, 2014, President Obama announced that he would nominate Blinken for the deputy secretary post, replacing the retiring William Joseph Burns. [33] On December 16, 2014, Blinken was confirmed as Deputy Secretary of State by the Senate by a vote of 55 to 38. [34]



Blinken in the <u>Situation Room</u> (back of the room, blue shirt, leaning) during the <u>Osama Bin</u> Laden raid

Of Obama's 2011 decision to kill Osama bin Laden, Blinken said

"I've never seen a more courageous decision made by a leader." A 2013 profile described him as one of the government's key players in drafting Syria policy", for which he served as a public face. Blinken was influential in formulating the Obama administration's response to the annexation of Crimea by the Russian Federation in the aftermath of the 2014 Ukrainian revolution. [37][38]

Blinken supported the 2011 military intervention in Libya [36] and the supply of weapons to Syrian rebels. [39] He condemned the 2016 Turkish coup d'état attempt and expressed support for the democratically elected Turkish government and its institutions, but also criticized the 2016—present purges in Turkey. [40] In April 2015, Blinken voiced support for the Saudi Arabian-led intervention in

Yemen. [41] He said that "as part of that effort, we have expedited weapons deliveries, we have increased our intelligence sharing, and we have established a joint coordination planning cell in the Saudi operation centre." [42]

Blinken worked with Biden on requests for American money to replenish <u>Israel</u>'s arsenal of <u>Iron Dome</u> interceptor missiles during the <u>2014 Israel-Gaza conflict</u>. <u>[43] In May 2015</u>, Blinken criticized the persecution of <u>Muslims in Myanmar</u> and warned Myanmar's leaders about the dangers of anti-Muslim legislation, <u>[44]</u> saying that <u>Rohingya Muslims</u> "should have a path to citizenship. The uncertainty that comes from not having any status is one of the things that may drive people to leave." <u>[45]</u>



Blinken with <u>Aung San Suu Kyi</u>, <u>Myanmar</u>'s leader, on January 18, 2016

In June 2015, Blinken claimed that more than ten thousand ISIL fighters had been killed by American-led airstrikes against the <u>Islamic State</u> since a U.S.-led coalition launched a <u>campaign</u> against it nine months ago. [46]

### **Private sector**

#### WestExec Advisors

In 2017, Blinken co-founded WestExec Advisors, a political strategy advising firm, with Michèle Flournoy, Sergio Aguirre, and Nitin Chadda. [47][48] WestExec's clients have included Google's Jigsaw, Israeli artificial-intelligence company Windward, surveillance drone manufacturer Shield AI, which signed a \$7.2 million contract with the Air Force, [49] and "Fortune 100 types". [50] According to Foreign Policy, the firm's clientele includes "the defense industry, private equity firms, and hedge funds". [51] Blinken received almost \$1.2 million in compensation from WestExec. [52]

In an interview with <u>The Intercept</u>, Flournoy described WestExec's role as facilitating relationships between <u>Silicon Valley</u> firms and the <u>Department of Defense</u> and law enforcement; <u>[53]</u> Flournoy and others compared WestExec to <u>Kissinger Associates</u>. <u>[53][54]</u>

### **Pine Island Capital Partners**

Blinken, as well as other Biden transition team members <u>Michele Flournoy</u>, former Pentagon advisor, and <u>Lloyd Austin</u>, nominee for Secretary of Defense, are partners of private equity firm Pine Island Capital Partners, [55][56] a strategic partner of WestExec. [57] Pine Island's chairman is <u>John Thain</u>, the final chairman of <u>Merrill Lynch</u> before its sale to <u>Bank of America</u>. [58] Blinken went on leave from Pine Island in August 2020 to join the Biden campaign as a senior foreign policy advisor. [56] He said he would divest himself of his equity stake in Pine Island if confirmed for a position in the Biden administration. [57]

During the final stretch of Biden's presidential campaign, Pine Island raised \$218 million for a Special purpose acquisition company (SPAC), a public offering to invest in "defense, government service and aerospace industries" and COVID-19 relief, which the firm's prospectus (initially filed with the U.S. SEC in September and finalized on November 13, 2020) predicted would be profitable as the

government looked to private contractors to address the pandemic. [56] Thain said he chose the other partners because of their "access, network and expertise". [49]

In a December 2020 New York Times article raising questions about potential conflicts of interest between WestExec principals, Pine Island advisors, including Blinken, and service in the Biden administration, critics called for full disclosure of all WestExec/Pine Island financial relationships, divestiture of ownership stakes in companies bidding on government contracts or enjoying existing contracts, and assurances that Blinken and others recuse themselves from decisions that might advantage their previous clients. [49]

Blinken is a member of the Council on Foreign Relations. [59] As of 2020, he was a global affairs analyst for CNN. [60][61]

# **Secretary of State**

On January 26, 2021, Blinken was confirmed as the <u>United States Secretary of State</u> by the Senate in a 78–22 vote. [62]

#### Nomination and tenure

Blinken was a foreign policy advisor for Biden's 2020 presidential campaign. On November 22, 2020, Bloomberg News reported that Biden had selected Blinken as his nominee for secretary of state. These reports were later corroborated by *The New York Times* and other outlets. On November 24, 2020, upon being announced as Biden's choice for secretary of state, Blinken said, We can't solve all the world's problems alone [and] we need to be working with other countries. He had earlier remarked in a September 2020 interview with the Associated Press that democracy is in retreat around the world, and unfortunately it's also in retreat at home because of the president taking a two-by-four to its institutions, its values and its people every day."

On January 7, the <u>State Department</u> told diplomats to affirm Biden's victory. [68] On January 8, Secretary <u>Mike Pompeo</u> met with Secretary-designate Blinken. [69] By a vote of 15–3, Blinken's



Blinken was sworn in as Secretary of State by <u>Carol Z.</u>
Perez, <u>Director General of the</u>
Foreign Service, on January 26, 2021.

nomination was reported out of the <u>Senate Foreign Relations Committee</u> on January 25, with a final vote scheduled for January 26. On January 26, Blinken was confirmed as <u>Secretary of State</u> by a vote of 78–22. He was sworn in later that day, taking the oath on a copy of the <u>Constitution</u>.

He said during his Senate confirmation hearings that "we are a long way from" getting back into the Iran nuclear agreement. [72]

Blinken condemned the 2021 Myanmar coup d'état and called for the release of detained officials. [73]

In February 2021, Blinken voiced support for <u>Afghani peace negotiations</u> with <u>Taliban</u> <u>Islamist</u> rebels. [74]

In March 2021, Blinken spoke with the <u>interim president</u> of <u>Venezuela</u>, <u>Juan Guaidó</u>, whom the Biden administration will continue to recognize as the country's head of state and not <u>Nicolás Maduro</u>. In that month Blinken also made his first trip overseas with <u>Secretary of Defense Austin</u> to Tokyo, <u>Japan</u> and <u>Seoul</u>, <u>South Korea</u>, during which he warned <u>China</u> against coercion and aggression.

In May 2021, Blinken visited the United Kingdom and Ukraine. [78][79]

# Foreign policy positions

On June 17, 2020, Blinken said Biden "would not tie military assistance to Israel to things like annexation or other decisions by the Israeli government with which we might disagree". [80] Blinken praised the Trump administration-brokered normalization agreements between Israel and Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates. [81][82]

On October 28, 2020, Blinken told *Jewish Insider* that a Biden administration plans to "undertake a strategic review" of the relationship between the United States and Saudi Arabia "to make sure that it is truly advancing our interests and is consistent with our values". [83] Blinken told *JI* that Biden administration "will continue non-nuclear" sanctions against Iran "as a strong hedge against Iranian misbehavior in other areas". [81] Blinken said the Trump administration helped China by "weakening American alliances, leaving a vacuum in the world for China to fill, abandoning our values and giving China a green light to trample on human rights and democracy from Xinjiang to Hong Kong". [84]

Blinken spoke of the differences Biden has with <u>India</u> over <u>Kashmir</u> and the <u>Citizenship Amendment Act</u> that critics say discriminates against <u>Muslims</u>. [85] He supports extending the <u>New START</u> arms control treaty with <u>Russia</u> to limit the number of <u>nuclear weapons</u> deployed by both sides. [31][86] He criticized President Trump's decision to withdraw from the <u>Iran nuclear</u>



Blinken and <u>Joe Biden</u> on a trip to Kosovo in 2009



Blinken spoke about the United States "recommitting to our alliances" at the European Commission in Brussels on March 25, 2021

<u>deal</u>. [87] Blinken told the Senate he wanted a "longer and stronger" nuclear deal with Iran. [88] In October 2020, *The New York Times* described Blinken as "ha[ving] Biden's ear on policy issues". [89]

In the confirmation hearing for his nomination as secretary of state, Blinken said that a Biden State Department would keep the <u>American embassy to Israel in Jerusalem</u> and would seek a <u>two-state</u> solution to the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. [90]

Crediting the Trump administration's hawkish approach on China, [91] he characterized the PRC as a "techno-autocracy" which seeks world dominance, indicated a desire to welcome political refugees from Hong Kong, stated that Biden administration's commitment to Taiwan's defense would "absolutely endure", and that a PRC attack on the island "would be a grievous mistake on their part". [92] Blinken said China is committing genocide and crimes against humanity against Uyghur Muslims and other ethnic minorities in its northwestern region of Xinjiang. [93] He said cooperation between India and the United States on issues including climate change was a plausible prospect. [94]

In response to questions from Senate Foreign Relations Committee chair Bob Menendez regarding the Eastern Mediterranean Security and Energy Partnership Act, Blinken indicated American interest in robust ties between herself, Greece, Israel, and Cyprus. [95] Furthermore, saying "we are very clear eyed" about the problems posed by an expansionist Turkey, which is "not acting like an ally", Antony Blinken indicated that he would consider sanctioning Erdogan's government. [96]

During his response to junior United States Senator from Kentucky Rand Paul, Blinken reaffirmed his support for keeping NATO's door open for Georgia, a country in the Caucasus, and raised the argument that countries that have joined NATO have been more effectively shielded from "Russian aggression". [97]



Blinken with Israeli Prime Minister <u>Benjamin Netanyahu</u> in Jerusalem, June 16, 2016

Blinken said the Biden administration will "review" security assistance to <u>Azerbaijan</u> due to the <u>2020</u> Nagorno-Karabakh war between Azerbaijan and <u>Armenia</u> over the <u>disputed region</u> of <u>Nagorno-Karabakh</u>. He voiced support for "the provision to Armenia of security assistance". [98]

In 2015, Blinken said judging between <u>Turkey</u> and the <u>Syrian Kurdish YPG</u> was "not even a matter of discussion" since <u>Turkey</u> is "an important U.S. ally". [99] He criticized President Trump's decision to withdraw U.S. troops from northern Syria. [43]

In October 2020, Blinken opposed Turkish president Recep Erdogan's call for "a two-state solution in Cyprus", saying the Biden administration is committed to reunification of Cyprus. [40][100]

On November 19, 2020, Blinken expressed concern over reports of escalating ethnic tensions in <u>Ethiopia's Tigray Region</u> and urged peaceful resolution of the Tigray conflict. [101]



Blinken with Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu at NATO headquarters in Brussels, March 2021

Blinken has referred to <u>Brexit</u> as a "total mess". [102] Blinken expressed concern over perceived <u>human rights violations</u> in <u>Egypt</u> under the presidency of <u>Abdel Fattah el-Sisi. [103]</u> He condemned the arrest of three employees for the <u>Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights</u> organization, and tweeted that "meeting with foreign diplomats is not a crime. Nor is peacefully advocating for human rights." Blinken characterized President Trump's <u>Phase One trade deal with China</u> as "a debacle". [105] He said it was unrealistic to "fully decouple" from <u>China</u>. [106] He has expressed support for "stronger economic ties with <u>Taiwan</u>". [107]

# Personal life

Blinken is Jewish. [108] In 2002, Blinken married Evan Ryan in a bi-denominational ceremony officiated by a rabbi and priest at Holy Trinity Catholic Church in Washington, D.C., [22][5] and they have two children together. [109] He is fluent in French. [110] He plays guitar and has three songs available on Spotify by the alias ABlinken [111] (pronounced like "Abe Lincoln"). [112]

# See also

- Mike Pompeo foreign policy
- John Kerry foreign policy
- Hillary Clinton foreign policy

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# **External links**

- Biography (https://www.state.gov/biographies/antony-j-blinken/) at the <u>United States</u>
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