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Top U.S. Diplomat Raises Navalny, Jailed Americans With Russia

By AFP

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U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken spoke with his Russian counterpart Sergei Lavrov on Thursday.
CNP via ZUMA Wire

U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken voiced concern over jailed opposition figure Alexei Navalny and imprisoned Americans in a telephone call Thursday with Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov.

President Joe Biden's administration has repeatedly voiced alarm over Navalny, President Vladimir Putin's most vocal critic whose doctors say he was poisoned and who was promptly detained last month on returning to Moscow.

Blinken in a call to Lavrov "reiterated President Biden's resolve to protect American citizens and act firmly in defense of U.S. interests in response to actions by Russia that harm us or our allies," a State Department statement said.

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"This includes the release of Paul Whelan and Trevor Reed so that they are able to return home to their families in the United States," it said.

Blinken also "raised Russian interference in the 2020 United States election, its military aggression in Ukraine and Georgia, the poisoning of Alexei Navalny and the SolarWinds incident, among other issues," it said referring to the massive SolarWinds hack in which U.S. intelligence suspected Russia.

The two top diplomats spoke after the Cold War rivals extended by five years New START, their last nuclear reduction treaty.

Former president Donald Trump had unsuccessfully pushed to expand New START, which would have expired this week, to include China, whose nuclear program is growing but remains significantly smaller than those of Russia and the United States.

The State Department said that Blinken and Lavrov addressed "the need for new arms control that addresses all of Russia's nuclear weapons and the growing threat from China."

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