

U.S., CHINA SPAR AT ALASKA MEET

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Tough talk: Secretary of State Antony Blinken, second from right, speaking to Chinese diplomats in Anchorage. AP/FREDERIC J. BROWN

The Biden administration's first bilateral engagement with Beijing got off to a rocky start as the two sides traded barbs with each other in front of the press, during the opening session of their dialogue in Anchorage, Alaska.

The U.S. side, led by Secretary of State Antony Blinken and National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan, opened with remarks that included references to China's actions in Tibet, Hong Kong, Xinjiang and accused Beijing of economic coercion. The Chinese side, led by Director of Foreign Affairs Yang Jiechi and State Councilor Wang Yi, questioned the U.S. narrative of China's role in the world and expressed, often sarcastically, its own concerns about U.S. actions — domestic and international. Earlier this month, State Department Spokesperson Ned Price had said the U.S. would "certainly not pull any punches" while discussing its disagreements with China. Thursday's opening remarks made evident that neither side was pulling any punches.

In his opening remarks, Mr. Blinken spoke of the rules-based international order. "The alternative to a rules-based order is a world in which might makes right and winners take all, and that would be a far more violent and unstable world for all of us," he said, apparently referring to a China-led world order. He also said the U.S. would like to discuss its "deep concerns" with China's actions in Xinjiang, Taiwan, Hong Kong, cyber attacks on the U.S. and "economic coercion" with regard to U.S. allies.

"Each of these actions threaten the rules-based order that maintains global stability. That's why they're not merely internal matters and why we feel an obligation to raise these issues here today," he said.

The main priorities of the U.S.'s approach to China and the world were the interests of the American people and protection of allies' interests, Mr. Sullivan told the Chinese delegation.

Mr. Yang said China and the international community were following a UN-led order not "the so called 'rules-based' international order". In an apparent reference to U.S. actions, Mr. Yang said: "We do not believe in invading through the use of force, or to topple other regimes through various means, or to massacre the people of other countries, because all of those would only cause turmoil and instability in this world."

He also called the discussion a "strategic dialogue" as Chinese officials had been doing in the run-up to the Anchorage interaction, in contrast to Mr. Blinken and his colleagues, who had repeatedly emphasised that they did not consider this a strategic dialogue. U.S. officials have said future discussions would be contingent on China changing its behaviour. Mr. Yang, in an apparent tit-for-tat reference to human rights issues, said America faced "deep seated" challenges on the rights front and cited the Black Lives Matter movement. He also called the U.S. a "champion" with regard to cyberattack capabilities.

Mr. Wang accused the U.S. of wanting to create an advantage for itself going into the talks by imposing sanctions on Chinese and Hong Kong officials. The State Department had announced sanctions on March 16 in response to Beijing's move to decrease the proportion of

democratically elected lawmakers in Hong Kong's legislature.

"This is not supposed to be the way one should welcome his guests," Mr. Wang said.

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