

Press Releases: Remarks With Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu Before Dinner

Remarks

Michael R. Pompeo

Secretary of State

Prime Minister Netanyahu's Residence

Jerusalem

March 21, 2019

PRIME MINISTER NETANYAHU: Secretary Pompeo, Mike, Susan, Ambassador David Friedman, I'm so excited. And we're so excited, Sara and I, to have you here, but especially on this evening. This is the eve of Purim, and we have a miracle of Purim. We call it *nes Purim*.

President Trump has just made history. I called him. I thanked him on behalf of the people of Israel. He did it again. First he recognized Jerusalem as Israel's capital and moved the U.S. embassy here. Then he pulled out of the disastrous Iran treaty and re-imposed sanctions. But now he did something of equal historic importance. He recognized Israel's sovereignty over the Golan Heights, and he did so at a time when Iran is trying to use Syria as a platform to attack and destroy Israel. And the message that President Trump has given the world is that America stands by Israel.

We are celebrating Purim when, 2,500 years ago, other Persians, led by Haman, tried to destroy the Jewish people. They failed then. And today, 2,500 years later, again Persians, led by Khamenei, are trying to destroy the Jewish people and the Jewish state. They are going to fail again.

We are deeply grateful for the U.S. support. We are deeply grateful for the unbelievable and unmatched support for our security and our right to defend ourselves and everything that you do on behalf of Israel and for the state of Israel in so many forms. So it is a distinct pleasure to welcome you and Susan to our home at any time, but especially today.

And let me add another word about that. We had a moving visit today to the wall. I can't resist repeating this, but I'm going to. I said to the Secretary that the last time Pompeo visited Jerusalem didn't end that well, but this is a different time. Rome and Jerusalem clashed over values. We had

a great tragedy for the Jewish people. But the new Rome, the United States, views itself as a new Jerusalem.

We visited the original city on the hill. We visited the hill. There is no greater friendship than the one between Israel and the United States, and no one represents it better than Secretary of State Mike Pompeo. You and Ambassador Friedman and your delegation are exceptional champions of our lives. I've called you so many times on so many things that this evening I just want to say one word – two actually: Thank you. Thank you, Mike Pompeo. Thank you, President Trump. And thank you, America.

To the people of Israel, I say: (In Hebrew, via translation) We have a miracle of Purim on our hands tonight. President Trump made history. He recognized Israeli sovereignty over the Golan Heights, at a time when Iran is trying to use the Golan Heights as a platform for the destruction of Israel. We are commemorating the miracle of Purim, when, 2,500 years ago, the Jewish people triumphed over the other Persians who tried to exterminate it. They will fail today, as they failed then, amongst other things thanks to the immense support of the United States and a president that is the greatest friend Israel ever had in our entire history. Thank you very much.

SECRETARY POMPEO: Thank you. I'll be very brief tonight. It's been a great visit. Susan and I had a chance to visit some of the Holy Sites today. As a person of faith, it's always inspiring to drive through the winding streets of the Old City. We had a chance to visit the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. And then the incredible privilege to visit the Western Wall with the prime minister of Israel as the American secretary of state was truly moving, important, and I think indicative of the remarkable relationship between our two countries.

As a cadet, I studied the battles of the Golan. There's a famous battle called the Battle of the Valley of Tears, and it was Israeli heroism at its most amazing, saving this great nation at a time of enormous challenge, a threat that came from east of the Golan, from Syria, a tank battle of epic and historic proportion, of amazing Israeli bravery.

Tonight President Trump made the decision to recognize that that hard-fought real estate, that important place, is proper to be a sovereign part of the state of Israel. President Trump made a bold decision to recognize that, an important decision for the people of Israel. It will truly be historic, and the people of Israel should know that the battles they fought, the lives that they lost on that very ground, were worthy and meaningful and important for all time.

We've had the chance on this visit to talk about lots of things. There are many threats to Israel and to the United States that we will work on together in the days and weeks and months ahead. I'll travel tomorrow to Lebanon to talk about the threat that Hizballah presents to the world and to the state of Israel and, frankly, to the people of Lebanon as well. We will redouble our efforts to make sure that we protect all that is important – all that is important to Israel, all that is important to America, and indeed, all that is important to the world. Thank you, Mr. Prime Minister.

PRIME MINISTER NETANYAHU: Thank you, America. Thank you. Thank you.

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Press Releases: Interview With Nadia Bilbassy of Al Arabiya

Interview
Michael R. Pompeo

Secretary of State

David Citadel Hotel
Jerusalem
March 21, 2019

QUESTION: Mr. Secretary, thank you for your time.

SECRETARY POMPEO: It's great to be with you. Thank you.

QUESTION: Let's start with Yemen. How are you going to force or convince the Houthis to come back to the table?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Well, as a first matter, they committed to withdrawing from Hodeidah in Stockholm. They entered into an agreement that said that they would depart. So every expectation is that they will do that. They've not done that yet, and so we are hopeful that they will honor the commitment they made. We will – hopeful that the pressure that we are putting on the Islamic Republic of Iran – who was the primary backstop for the Houthis, providing them not only resources but missile systems that have landed in places like Saudi Arabia – we're very hopeful that this pressure will convince the Houthis that they need to return to the political table, they need to have a discussion, they cannot win this militarily, and that we're determined to ensure that order is restored in Yemen.

QUESTION: Do you think the Iranians instructed them to withdraw from the Sweden agreement?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Hard to know, but I imagine there's very little that the Houthis do that isn't at the direction of the ayatollah or Qasem Soleimani.

QUESTION: Your next step is Beirut. You're going to meet with the president, President Aoun, and the foreign minister. They both said publicly that they're proud to be part of a government that Hizballah, which you consider a terrorist organization, as part of it. How do you square that?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Hizballah is clearly a terrorist organization, and we – in the Trump administration, we call them like they really are. My regret is that for the past decade the American administration hasn't done nearly enough, hasn't made clear our expectations.

Look, we want good things for the people of Lebanon. You know their tradition. It's a once truly proud, successful economic powerhouse. It can be that again. It can't do so with terrorists as part of their government. It can't be the case that terrorists can occupy places and put missiles that are aimed squarely at Israel. There are risks to Lebanon from that. And the Lebanese people, I think, know this. What they need is they need support from outside to help them, to make sure that there is support and clarity on these issues. And that's what I hope to share with them when I visit tomorrow and the next day in Lebanon.

QUESTION: Are you going to announce sanctions on Hizballah or the Iranian while you're there or here?

SECRETARY POMPEO: So I never get out in front of announcements on sanctions. You'll see them when we announce them.

QUESTION: That's the expectation, that you will say something on this trip.

SECRETARY POMPEO: Yeah, we'll see.

QUESTION: Why you haven't declared or announced that the Revolutionary Guard – the Iranian Revolutionary Guard – on the State Department terrorist list? The Treasury put them on, but not the State Department.

SECRETARY POMPEO: Yeah. We're constantly looking at which groups we will designate, which ones we'll choose not to. In each case, we're trying to make a determination how we can best effectuate our policy. Remember the objective. The objective is to convince the Islamic Republic of Iran to support its people that don't want this. They don't want the country assassinating people in Europe; they don't want their country supporting Hamas; they don't want their money going for Hizballah and the Houthis. Our mission is we think about everything we do tactically, whether it's a designation or a sanction that we put in place. Our mission set is to convince the Islamic Republic of Iran to do what its people want and to behave like a normal nation.

QUESTION: Is this any backchannel between the United States and Iran?

SECRETARY POMPEO: If there was, would I tell you?

QUESTION: Well, we know later it happened with the Obama administration.

SECRETARY POMPEO: Yes. Our mission set with respect to Iran is very, very clear.

QUESTION: You imposed biting sanction on the Iranians. You say the economy is in bad shape, yet they call the shot in Lebanon, in Yemen, in Iraq, and in Syria. Are you failing to confront their expansion?

SECRETARY POMPEO: No, I don't think we are. We started in a really bad place. Remember, the previous administration's policy was very different. They entered into the JCPOA, which guaranteed Iran a path to a nuclear weapon. We pulled out of it. They sidled up to the Iranian regime. Most of what – most of the missile systems that you're seeing today, these are things that were developed under the JCPOA. Most of the terror that you've seen began and continued during the time of the JCPOA.

We've fundamentally shifted course. We're beginning our efforts. There's more work to do. I'm convinced that not only the United States but the coalition that we have built – right, our partners in the Gulf states, our partners here in Israel – I'm convinced that the coalition that we've built that understands the threat that the Islamic Republic of Iran presents to the world will ultimately convince them to do what the Iranian people richly deserve.

QUESTION: On Syria, sir, why you keeping 400 troops there? Is this any deal with the Russians?

SECRETARY POMPEO: No, we're continuing the mission that we've had since the beginning of this administration, which is the defeat of the caliphate and ultimately pushing back against radical Islamic terrorism wherever we find it. Decisions on specific troop levels change. They change over time. Our footprint, how we confront that terrorism, changes. We conduct it differently in Asia and in Africa and in the Middle East over time. We try to bring the right tools to bear, the right instruments of power to bear, to achieve the outcome, which is soon the complete destruction of the caliphate and then the continued pressure on radical Islamic terrorism, whether it's al-Qaida or ISIS or anyone else.

QUESTION: You said Jerusalem is still a final status issue. Does that mean that East Jerusalem will be the capital of a Palestinian state in the future?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Yeah, we're not going to make any announcements about the plan. Soon enough, we will share our vision for how this intractable problem, now decades on, might be resolved.

QUESTION: So you're going to impose it on the Palestinians, even if they don't participate?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Stay tuned.

QUESTION: Okay. We're going to ask you about the self-autonomy. I mean, I have to try with this one. There is talk that –

SECRETARY POMPEO: All right. Keep trying.

QUESTION: – the Israelis – well, there's some talks that actually you're going to have self-autonomy for the Palestinians, but not a Palestinian state. Is this something that we can consider?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Yeah, look, there have been lots of people talking about what's in the vision that we'll put out. What I think I can share with folks today, before the time that we introduce our vision, is we want a better life for the Palestinian people. The Palestinian people live next to Israel. This is going to be the case. We want each of them to have – be able to have a life for themselves and for their children and their grandchildren that is better than the one they have today, with a decreased risk of violence. And when you see the vision, when you see the plan that is presented, I think the whole world will see how America's thinking about this. Ultimately, this will be resolved between the Palestinians and Israel, but America trying to put its vision forward I think will potentially break the logjam.

QUESTION: Two quick questions on Israel. You said you don't interfere with Israel election. You appear with Prime Minister Netanyahu and he's meeting with President Trump on Monday. Is that a political statement?

SECRETARY POMPEO: No, not at all. The pressing issues of the day, the issues that I work on nearly every day, don't wait for election cycles. I remind people that Qasem Soleimani doesn't care about your election. He's continuing to challenge Israel today, tomorrow. He'll do it on election day as well. These are not things that are timed against elections. These are important relationships between the United States and Israel, security efforts, economic relationships between the two countries, and they happen no matter who's having an election, whether it's here in Israel or in the United States.

QUESTION: Finally, will you allow Mr. Jonathan Pollard to come back with Mr. Netanyahu?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Yeah, I don't have anything to share with you on that today.

QUESTION: Thank you so much, Mr. Secretary.

SECRETARY POMPEO: Thank you very much. It was wonderful to be with you.

QUESTION: Likewise.

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[Press Releases: Interview With Yonit Levi of Channel 12](#)

Interview

Michael R. Pompeo

Secretary of State

David Citadel Hotel, Jerusalem

March 21, 2019

QUESTION: Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, thank you so much for finding the time to talk to us in this whirlwind of a tour of yours, sir.

SECRETARY POMPEO: It's great to be with you. Thank you.

QUESTION: This is an important visit to Kuwait, to Israel, and to Lebanon. Here in Israel, however, sir, we're in the final stages of a very intense election race, and Netanyahu's detractors are saying that the Trump administration is doing all in its power – and undoubtedly, it has power – to ensure that Netanyahu gets re-elected. How do you respond to that?

SECRETARY POMPEO: So my trip and, frankly, the prime minister's visit to Washington next week, are about really – real pressing issues, things that matter to the world. They are time-sensitive, whether it's the challenges that are presented by the Islamic Republic of Iran or the issues in Syria. These are issues that can't wait, and they don't work on election clocks. Our mission is to work the power of the United States and Israel together against these common threats, and it's why I'm here today and I know it's what the President and prime minister will talk about next week as well.

QUESTION: President Trump said in Hanoi three weeks ago that Netanyahu was a strong leader, and then you said he'll be accepted in Washington with all the pomp and circumstance that he – that will happen next week. You're here with all the images that generates. This does add some inordinate amount of political cache for Netanyahu at a critical time obviously here.

SECRETARY POMPEO: Qasem Soleimani doesn't care about your election. Qasem Soleimani is continuing to press the case. Hizballah's continuing to press its case. Each and every day, the Islamic Republic of Iran is continuing to – its efforts to wipe Israel off the face of the planet. There's no time like the present to make sure and address this issue. It's why I'm here today. It's why I'll be in Lebanon tomorrow and the next day to talk about these issues that are truly of the moment.

QUESTION: Can you ensure the Israeli public that the warm relationship between the American leadership and the Israeli leadership will continue even if Netanyahu loses on April 9th?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Oh, I fully expect that's the case. The history of the relationship between our two countries is deep. It is strong. It survives presidents and prime ministers. It is truly between the two nations where its peoples have shared common value sets, two democracies, two nations that care deeply about the well-being of their people, and two nations that share a set of common threats as well.

QUESTION: It is obviously a common practice upon diplomatic visits to a democratic ally to also meet leaders of the opposition. Have you met, spoken with Benny Gantz or any other leaders of the opposition?

SECRETARY POMPEO: I haven't on this trip, but Mr. Gantz has met with other American leaders. The Israeli people will speak in a handful of days. They'll make their decision, and America and Israel will move forward together.

QUESTION: So let's move from the political quagmire in Israel to a very simple task of bringing peace to the Middle East. And every – the architects of the deal, it's coined "the deal of the century," whether if it's Kushner or Ambassador Friedman or Greenblatt, are keeping the cards quite close to the chest. It's very frustrating for us journalists. But can I ask you to divulge anything about the plan? President Trump said famously, I'm happy if it's one state, I'm happy if it's two state, if the parties themselves are happy with it. Can you tell us if the term "two-state solution" will appear in the final plan?

SECRETARY POMPEO: So I can't share much about it. We're still working our way through it. In due course, we'll present the plan. The whole world will get a chance to see the vision that we have for how we might bring peace to solve this intractable problem.

QUESTION: Due course is weeks, months? When should we expect it?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Well, soon. I appreciate you asking, but soon enough, when the time is most appropriate. Remember the mission set. We want a better life for the Palestinian people. I know the Israeli people want that, too. We want peace between the Palestinians and the Israelis. These are commonly held objectives. A broadly shared vision for how to achieve it is something that we're hoping that the ideas that we'll be bringing forth will achieve.

QUESTION: But is it – obviously, if you say something like autonomy, which is

what Ambassador Friedman said to *The Washington Examiner*, Palestinians, for them, it's a nonstarter. They're not going to be in the table, they're not even going to be in the same universe, if that's what the plan is going to say.

SECRETARY POMPEO: Well, I'm hopeful. I've seen the plan. I have a pretty good understanding of its details, although there are a handful still to be worked out. I'm very hopeful that all nations – the Israelis, the Palestinian people, the Arab states, European countries, people from all around the world – will stare at this plan and say this has got merit, this has legs, this is a reason that we can begin to build and move forward. I expect that that will be the case.

We hope that when we present it, everyone will take this seriously, they'll give it good thought. There may be things they don't like, there may be things they love about the ideas that we put forth, but they'll use it as a platform that we can build on to achieve what, frankly, administrations before us have tried to help achieve but have been unsuccessful.

QUESTION: But again, is this going to be in that vision of the historic U.S. policy of two states, or it's going to be something completely different?

SECRETARY POMPEO: We'll just have to wait and see.

QUESTION: (Laughter.) You're good at building the tension on this, sir. Is it true that the United States had to wait until after the election to publish it, to not – to foil Netanyahu's situation here?

SECRETARY POMPEO: No, look, we've been waiting for the right time until we had the plan fully developed, that we'd had input from lots of different people with lots of different thoughts about how to achieve the right outcome. So it's taken some time for us to get ready, and when the moment is right we'll share that vision.

QUESTION: You mentioned the Iranian threat, and obviously it's been – Israel has hailed the President Trump's decision to basically withdraw from the nuclear agreement with Iran. What is the endgame, sir? Is the endgame to put pressure on Iran and to get a better deal? Or would the endgame, in your opinion, be regime change or anything of that sort?

SECRETARY POMPEO: So the way we think about this is in a broader context, right. The objective is stability in the Middle East and peace and less violence in the Middle East and fewer times where there are crises here in the Middle East. That's the objective.

Today, the primary mover for malign influence in the Middle East is the Islamic Republic of Iran, whether that's the assassination campaign in Europe, the funding of the Houthis, the money that goes to Hamas and Hizballah, the support for the PMCs in Iraq, the malfeasance in Syria. The list of Iranian aggression and threats to the world is long. What we're asking Iran to do is simply stop those things, to behave like a normal nation, like we ask every other country to behave. If they do those things,

we'll all move forward together.

As for the JCPOA, look, it was a disastrous deal. It guaranteed that Iran would have a path to a nuclear weapon. It was unacceptable. It was unacceptable for America, it was unacceptable for Israel, in our judgment an unacceptable risk to the world. So we withdrew from that. Today, we're engaged in a pressure campaign to convince the Iranian regime to stay away from the nuclear weapons program, to stay away from developing that nuclear capability, and to engage in the world in a way that normal nations do.

QUESTION: By the way, you were CIA director. Do you see any sort of work by Iranians to relentlessly break into Israeli officials' phones? Do you know of any of that kind of attempt?

SECRETARY POMPEO: So I don't want to talk about specifics, but suffice it to say we've made clear that the Iranian efforts – their cyber campaigns, their efforts to break into technology all across the world – are real. They are sophisticated and require attention from the best counter-cyber teams in the world, among those the United States and Israel.

QUESTION: Are you planning on changing or saying that the U.S. will recognize Israeli sovereignty in the Golan Heights?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Yeah, I don't have anything to add for you today.

QUESTION: Sir, my final question, if that's okay. You jokingly said that the President might one day end your job with a tweet. You're very close to the President. I wonder if what we're seeing is sort of the era of diplomacy on Twitter or decision making on Twitter or governance on Twitter, actually.

SECRETARY POMPEO: No, I was just talking about something that cabinet officials say all the time. They serve at the pleasure of the President. At any moment the President decides that he doesn't want us to do that anymore, we will graciously move on with our lives. We serve at his pleasure. That was my point that I said in a kidding fashion.

No, I don't think we're seeing diplomacy by Twitter. It still requires thoughtfulness, it requires resources, it requires capability and determination. But the ability to communicate, the ability to rapidly spread messages around the world through social media, including Twitter, is absolutely important. It allows leaders around the world to share their views instantaneously with millions of people, something that was more difficult before. And that's our real power; it's another element to the capacity to shape the world.

QUESTION: Yeah, and obviously there's the importance of personal conversation. Secretary Mike Pompeo, again, thank you so much for talking with us.

SECRETARY POMPEO: Thank you very much.

QUESTION: Thank you.

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[Press Releases: Interview With Barak Ravid of Channel 13](#)

Interview
Michael R. Pompeo

Secretary of State

David Citadel Hotel, Jerusalem
March 21, 2019

QUESTION: Secretary Pompeo, thank you for granting us this interview.

SECRETARY POMPEO: It's great to be with you. Thank you.

QUESTION: Let's dive right in. Your visit here is three weeks before the elections in Israel. Aren't you concerned that it might be perceived as interference?

SECRETARY POMPEO: I came here because there's pressing issues. As I told someone earlier, Qassem Soleimani's not watching the election. All the folks who are trying to do harm and destruction to Israel and to the United States aren't watching the election. I'm here because there's real business, real pressing issues, and those are the topics with which I've spoken with the Israeli officials that I've met with.

QUESTION: Because we heard President Trump in Vietnam just the other week giving support to Prime Minister Netanyahu; he will be hosting Netanyahu next week at the White House. It seems a bit like an endorsement.

SECRETARY POMPEO: Well, look, the President and the prime minister have a relationship. But I'm here because of the important relationship between the United States and Israel. This is a long, long-term relationship and an incredibly important one to both countries, and we have to get this right. We have to get it right always, and we can't let election schedules drive the

work that we're doing together.

QUESTION: President Trump did something very interesting. He brought back the word "peace" into the Israeli political debate. When is the administration going to unveil its peace plan?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Soon.

QUESTION: Meaning?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Stay tuned. I don't have a date. We want to do several things. We want to make sure we have the vision, the vision that we intend to set out, as right as we can possibly make it. We want to make sure that when we unveil and when we share it with the world that it is good enough, that it will be thoughtfully considered by all parties, certainly by the Palestinians and by the Israelis but by everyone in the world who has been trying for decades to resolve this conflict. And we're hopeful that what we present will be a building block so that good things can continue to happen.

QUESTION: So let's talk about Palestinians. They're not really talking to you for more than a year. They say that any plan you'll put on the table will actually be a Bibi plan. Doesn't this mean that the peace plan, your peace plan, might be dead on arrival?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Well, I don't expect that. I hope that the Palestinians will give it due consideration. I expect actually that they will. The United States wants good things for the Palestinian people, and our plan will show that. You'll see that. When you see the plan, you will see the evidence that we want that. I hope that the Palestinians, both on the West Bank and in the Gaza Strip, will give this due consideration; they'll provide their feedback. There'll be things that they like; there may well be things that they don't like. What we hope is they will take a good look at it, a serious look at it, give it due consideration, and then it can provide the basis for moving forward.

QUESTION: Will this peace plan endorse the two-state solution?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Yeah, just stay tuned.

QUESTION: No, because President Trump said last September at the UN – and you were there –

SECRETARY POMPEO: I was there.

QUESTION: – he said that he prefers a two-state solution.

SECRETARY POMPEO: I was sitting there. What he really said was that this will ultimately be figured out between the Palestinians and the Israeli people.

QUESTION: You visited the Western Wall today together with Prime Minister Netanyahu. Does this mean that it's a policy shift by the Trump administration and that now you recognize the Western Wall as part of Israel?

SECRETARY POMPEO: That was a very special trip. I was honored to be there. I was honored to be at the Western Wall any time, but it was especially nice to be there with the prime minister of Israel. There's no policy change. I wanted to go there, be there, and I'm really happy that I had that opportunity. We had the chance, too, to go down and see the tunnels, some of the history, some of the amazing history of the Jewish people here, dating back thousands of years. That history was special; the moment with the prime minister was special. And it's always great to be in the city of Jerusalem.

QUESTION: After you moved the embassy to Jerusalem, President Trump said that now it will be Israel's turn to pay a price. Does this mean that your peace plan will include some sort of a Palestinian capital in East Jerusalem?

SECRETARY POMPEO: I'm not going to talk about the plan itself. You can ask several more times if you want.

QUESTION: I'm trying, I'm trying.

SECRETARY POMPEO: I appreciate that.

QUESTION: You can give me that.

SECRETARY POMPEO: No, I have great respect for you for continuing to ask. What you'll see, when you see the plan, is you will see a vision for what we believe is a carefully thought out process by which a good outcome can be delivered for all the people in the region. We hope everyone will see that, we hope the Arabs, the Europeans, the Palestinians, the Israelis, everyone will – who will ultimately have some say and provide their input will see it for what it is: a sincere effort to resolve this long-time conflict.

QUESTION: Do you expect the Israeli Government to say yes?

SECRETARY POMPEO: We'll have to see. We – our expectation of everyone is that they'll read it, they'll take a good look, and that they'll share with us what – the pieces they find acceptable, those that they'd like to see some way different. We'll begin to build it forward.

QUESTION: Do you think that the unity government in Israel after the elections might help promoting this plan?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Goodness, I don't know. Do you know how the elections are going to end? (Laughter.)

QUESTION: Do you? Do you have a guess? Do you want to share?

SECRETARY POMPEO: I do not. I do not. I thought maybe you had some insights.

QUESTION: You want to take a bet?

SECRETARY POMPEO: (Laughter.) I'll stay. I've got plenty of challenges without involving myself in the outcome of the Israeli elections.

QUESTION: So let's move to Syria. Does the Trump administration consider

recognizing Israeli sovereignty in the Golan Heights?

SECRETARY POMPEO: So we're always considering lots of different things, and certainly we've considered many things when it comes to how to treat different challenges in Syria. When we think of Syria, we think about it as a big problem. It has been a place where ISIS has festered. We are almost done completing the destruction of the caliphate, something that we're very proud of that we worked alongside 80-plus nations to achieve. We saw the work that was done against ISIS in Iraq, so from – literally from Iraq to Lebanon, the place that I'm traveling next, the challenges that are faced are real. The Islamic Republic of Iran is at the center of most of those challenges and we're determined in each of those places to put America and Israel in a better place in the coming weeks and months.

QUESTION: Does this mean that you think or that the administration thinks that the Golan Heights needs to be part of Israel in any future solution?

SECRETARY POMPEO: We'll – the President will ultimately make that decision. I don't have anything to announce here today.

QUESTION: Was there any discussion already inside the administration about this issue of recognizing Israeli sovereignty of the Golan Heights?

SECRETARY POMPEO: I've been really good in my almost a year as Secretary of State not talking about internal debates. I'm going to keep my record flawless.

QUESTION: But I heard Prime Minister Netanyahu say that publicly, when you gave a statement –

SECRETARY POMPEO: Yes, it's something – it's something he'd clearly like.

QUESTION: And did he raise it in your meeting?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Yes. We've talked about it on a number of occasions.

QUESTION: And what did you tell him?

SECRETARY POMPEO: I told him the same thing I just told you. (Laughter.)

QUESTION: But let's stay on Syria. Many in Israel and other places in the world, but in Israel in particular, are concerned about the U.S. pullout from Syria. I think people see, in a way, the U.S. getting out and the Russians and the Iranians coming in.

SECRETARY POMPEO: Yeah. They're just wrong. First, America is not pulling out, but remember, there's been all this focus on the number of soldiers there in Syria. What's really important is the mission set, so multiple mission sets. The first one is the defeat and the destruction of the caliphate, then again pushing back against the broader challenges of radical Islamic terrorism – not only ISIS, but al-Qaida, all the folks that are up in Idlib. This terror issue is real. The United States has many platforms, many places from which we effectuate that.

The second piece is our campaign against Iran. It has lots of pieces. So while there's been this inordinate focus on how many American soldiers might be in Syria, I can tell your viewers American policy has not changed one iota. Our mission, the defeat of ISIS, pushing back against the threat from radical Islamic terrorism and pushing back against the Islamic Republic of Iran remains unchanged.

QUESTION: The last two questions before we finish: I want to talk to you about Jonathan Pollard, the Israeli spy. Will the Trump administration consider dropping the limitations on Mr. Pollard and allowing him to travel to Israel?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Yeah, I don't have anything to say there. It's a matter that's not in my purview.

QUESTION: So you didn't discuss this with Prime Minister Netanyahu?

SECRETARY POMPEO: I don't want to talk about the private conversations that I had on issues that are of that nature.

QUESTION: Last question: How concerned is the Trump administration by the growing ties between Israel and China?

SECRETARY POMPEO: So, China broadly presents a real opportunity. They're an economic powerhouse and there are lots of opportunities that countries have to do business with China. When China behaves transparently, when China is engaged in real economic transactions, we are untroubled. When China behaves using debt as a trap, when China bribes, when China engages in spying through its commercial state-owned enterprises, and presents risk through its technology systems – companies like Huawei which present real risk to the people of Israel – when those things happen, we want to make sure that countries know about it, know the risks, and then countries will make their own sovereign decisions. We'll have to do the same. Where some –

QUESTION: So do you want to see a policy shift in Israel towards China?

SECRETARY POMPEO: I want to make sure that every country is wide-eyed and awake with respect to the threats that are posed by China and then make sure they understand as well America will have to make decisions too. If certain systems go in certain places, then America's efforts to work alongside you will be more difficult, and in some cases, we won't be able to do so.

QUESTION: Like intelligence sharing?

SECRETARY POMPEO: You can imagine lots of different places. Intelligence sharing might have to be reduced, co-location of security facilities might have to be reduced. We want to make sure that countries understand this and know these risks.

QUESTION: Mr. Secretary, thank you very much for this interview.

SECRETARY POMPEO: Thank you very much, sir.

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Interview
Michael R. Pompeo

Secretary of State

Kuwait City, Kuwait
March 20, 2019

QUESTION: Mr. Secretary, thank you for having us today, and it's a privilege to be with you today.

SECRETARY POMPEO: It's wonderful to be with you. Thank you for your time today.

QUESTION: First of all, let me go through the deep relationship that are shared among the state of Kuwait and the United States of America. Would you further elaborate on the history of these friendly ties?

SECRETARY POMPEO: So the two nations have a long, storied, proud tradition partnering together, working alongside each other against threats all throughout the region. We all know the stories from the early 1990s, but the stories go on even these past years, where we work together on so many things. It's what I'm here today to do, to continue to develop the partnership between the United States and Kuwait.

QUESTION: Yes. Mr. Secretary, you will be holding several meetings during your visit in Kuwait, including the third Kuwait-U.S. Strategic Dialogue. Let us know more about it.

SECRETARY POMPEO: So there are many components to it. I will, I'll get a chance to meet with His Majesty the Amir, my foreign ministry counterpart, the deputy prime minister. The strategic dialogue has been going on now since

2016, and we'll talk about the important strategic elements of our relationship, our security relationship to be sure, where we keep both the people of the United States and Kuwait safer as a result. But there are important economic pillars to this as well, and our political relationship matters, whether we're countering ISIS or the threats that Iran presents to the region, working to make sure that the Gulf Cooperation Council is working and functioning and delivering security and peace to the region. These will be all parts of our agenda today and I am confident we'll make progress on each of those things.

QUESTION: Yes, connected to the agenda, Mr. Secretary, how do you think the agenda will help strengthen mutual cooperation between both countries?

SECRETARY POMPEO: So we'll sign some agreements today too, which I think will be important. They'll deepen the economic relationship. Kuwait and Kuwaiti companies are big investors in the United States, and many American companies are part of the Kuwaiti economy. These are deep, strong, proud commercial relationships that build on the security relationship between our two countries as well.

QUESTION: Yes. Mr. Secretary, regarding your tour to the Middle East and several Arab capitals, including Egypt, Amman, and the Gulf, GCC, like Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Bahrain, now Kuwait. So of course, it has like a certain – the GCC has, like, their common stances and views on the regional and international issues. In your opinion, Mr. Secretary, what would your visit add on this regard?

SECRETARY POMPEO: So I've been to the Middle East many times. I've had great meetings. I've been here to Kuwait several times before as well. Each time we're able to build on what we've done before, and the world changes. The threats change as well. And so each of the encounters – I'll travel from here to Israel and then on to Lebanon – in each place we'll be working on a set of common objectives. There will be places too where we'll have different views, where we'll have different ideas about how to solve these particular problems, and having these meetings, both with me and my counterparts and each of our teams, to begin to work on how we actually execute and implement those shared objectives.

QUESTION: Yes, let me close this with this question, and I will talk about the role of His Majesty, the Amir of Kuwait, Sheikh Sabah al-Ahmad Jabir al-Sabah, about his mediation in the GCC conflict or issues and the humanitarian part, like helping the Syrian and Yemeni and Iraqi people. How do you describe that, Mr. Secretary?

SECRETARY POMPEO: So His Majesty the Amir has done fantastic work on each of those fronts. Kuwait and the Kuwaiti people have been most generous in helping with the humanitarian crisis. You mentioned Syria. You mentioned Yemen, an enormous humanitarian challenge. Kuwait has been at the forefront of trying to provide assistance for those in the region who really need help, and he has also been determined to try and make sure that all of the Gulf states get along, that they realize that their shared objective, the threats that are posed to them collectively, override anything that may fall between

them where there's differences. And so he's worked to create peace and stability throughout the Middle East too. Your country should be very proud of that.

QUESTION: Yeah, thank you so much, Mr. Secretary –

SECRETARY POMPEO: Thank you.

QUESTION: – for having us today, and it's such a pleasure and honor to have you today on Kuwait TV.

SECRETARY POMPEO: Thank you very much. I enjoyed it a great deal. It's wonderful to be here.

QUESTION: Thank you, thank you.

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