

# Press Releases: Background Briefing Previewing Secretary Pompeo's Upcoming Travel to Mexico

Special Briefing  
Senior State Department Official  
Via Teleconference  
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**MODERATOR:** Thank you very much, and thank you, everyone, for joining us today. I'm glad to have with us today [Senior State Department Official]. He's going to talk to us today on background about Secretary Pompeo's travel tomorrow to Mexico City. Again, this call will be on background. He will be referred to as a SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL. The contents of this call are embargoed until the end of the call.

And with that, I'll turn it over to [Senior State Department Official]. Thank you.

**SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL:** Thank you, [Moderator]. And thanks to everyone who's joining us today.

Secretary of State Michael Pompeo will travel to Mexico City on Friday, July 13th to meet with President Enrique Pena Nieto, Foreign Secretary Luis Videgaray, and President-elect Lopez Obrador. This is an important trip scheduled at a key moment in our bilateral relationship. Secretary Pompeo will reaffirm the U.S. partnership with Mexico to combat transnational criminal organizations and address the opioid epidemic. He will also discuss efforts to enhance trade, curb irregular migration, and manage our shared border. The Secretary will discuss continued U.S.-Mexico cooperation with the Pena Nieto administration throughout the transition.

The United States also looks forward to working closely with President-elect Lopez Obrador to continue strengthening the U.S.-Mexico relationship after his new administration takes office on December 1.

Secretary Pompeo will travel to Mexico with a high-level U.S. delegation, including Senior Advisor to the President Jared Kushner, Secretary of Homeland Security Nielsen, and Secretary of the Treasury Mnuchin. This delegation is noteworthy and a testament to the importance the administration and the United States places on the bilateral relationship.

Turning quickly to the trip schedule, Secretary Pompeo will fly down to

Mexico City on Friday morning. After he lands, he will go directly to Los Pinos to meet with President Enrique Peña Nieto. Following this meeting, he will meet with President-elect Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador. The Secretary will then meet with his counterpart, Foreign Secretary Luis Videgaray, and participate in a joint press availability at the ministry of foreign affairs.

I want to emphasize the Secretary's visit is about the strength and importance of our ongoing cooperation with Mexico. The Mexican political transition is long in comparison to what we have here in the United States – about five months. So there's a lot of important work we will continue to do over the next months with the administration of President Peña Nieto.

The visit is also about our future relationship with the incoming government. President Trump had a very positive call with President-elect Lopez Obrador following the Mexican elections, and this trip will be a good opportunity to continue our conversation and to get to know each other.

Thank you. And with that, I'm happy to take your questions.

**MODERATOR:** Thank you. We'll take the first question.

**OPERATOR:** We have a question from the line of Elise Labott with CNN. Please, go ahead.

**QUESTION:** Thanks very much, [Senior State Department Official]. The first thing you mentioned in terms of the visit was – in terms of the bilateral relationship was combatting transnational criminal organizations. I'm wondering if in particular you're referring to MS-13, and also whether you're kind of suggesting that that's kind of the problem with the immigrant crisis that we're seeing right now. It seems as if there has been a little bit of a conflating with transnational crime and all of the immigrants that are coming in.

**SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL:** Thank you for the question. Our effort to combat transnational criminal organizations in Mexico is directly linked to our concern about the opioid crisis in our country and the flow of drugs across our border. And so we will want to continue to work closely with the outgoing Mexican Government on those efforts and look forward to discussing that issue with the Mexican president-elect.

**MODERATOR:** Thank you. Next question, please.

**OPERATOR:** We have a question from the line of Carol Morello with *The Washington Post*.

**QUESTION:** (Inaudible) talk with you briefly. I was hoping you could talk a little bit about the agenda, particularly whether you expect to be discussing a safe third party agreement. And with the inclusion of Secretary Mnuchin, does that suggest that you are going to be offering them some sort of a proposal? I was wondering what kind of incentives you might offer. And while you're at it, could you tell us if you plan – if they plan to discuss the border wall? Thanks.

**SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL:** Thank you, Carol. The fact that the State Department, DHS, and Treasury, and the President's senior advisor Jared Kushner are traveling together shows that this is a whole-of-government approach and underscores the importance of our relationship with Mexico. There will be, as I outlined in my opening comments, a broad discussion of the ongoing issues and cooperation with the Pena Nieto administration, and I expect that we will want to ensure that the incoming administration is aware of those issues as well.

With regard to the specific items you raised, I think we'll have to wait to see how the meetings go.

**MODERATOR:** Thank you. We'll take the next question, please.

**OPERATOR:** We have a question from the line of Nike Ching with Voice of America. Please, go ahead.

**QUESTION:** Thank you very much. Yes, my question is a follow-up on the safe third country discussion between the two countries. What is the incentive for Mexican Government to agree on such a deal, and would the United States consider providing financial aid to help Mexico settle new asylum seekers? Thank you.

**SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL:** Thank you for that question. Again, as I said, we have a broad agenda related to this visit. Migration issues are an incredible, important, and complex issue that we are – that the administration is addressing. With respect to specific agreements, I would defer – I would refer you to the Department of Homeland Security that is taking the lead on those discussions.

**MODERATOR:** Thank you. We'll take the next question, please.

**OPERATOR:** We have a question from the line of Susannah George with Associated Press. Please, go ahead.

**QUESTION:** Hi there. Thanks so much for doing this call. I was wondering if the Secretary of State or the Trump administration has found someone in the incoming – in the president-elect's circle who could act as a point person in the way that the Mexican foreign minister has acted over the past more than a year and a half now with regards to U.S.-Mexico relations.

**SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL:** Thank you. As I stated, President Trump and the president-elect had a very positive phone call immediately after the Mexican elections, and this visit is to build and to move forward on that call and to begin previewing and reviewing the broad agenda we have with Mexico across the different areas such as migration, the commercial relationship. And so I expect that on this first visit tomorrow we will have a chance to meet the president-elect and members of his team and ensure they are aware of the depth and breadth of our relationship.

**MODERATOR:** Thank you. We'll take the next question.

**OPERATOR:** We have a question from the line of Jesus Esquivel with *Proceso*

magazine. Please, go ahead.

**QUESTION:** Hi, my question is with regard to the – if there is any possibility that in this trip Secretary Pompeo will invite formally Andres Lopez Obrador, as president-elect, to have a meeting with President Trump in Washington or in another state inside of the United States.

**SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL:** I think that's an excellent question. I don't have anything for you on that. I will check into it.

**MODERATOR:** Thank you. Next question, please.

**OPERATOR:** We have a question from the line of Daphne Psaledakis with Reuters. Please, go ahead.

**QUESTION:** Hi, thanks for doing this. I wanted to ask if you are going to have any discussions on NAFTA and what kind of details you're looking to get moving forward, as well as what areas you see for cooperation with the Lopez Obrador administration given that he was elected with a landslide 53 percent of the vote, or will that make it more difficult to find agreement?

**SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL:** Daphne, thank you for that question. The United States is committed to a comprehensive NAFTA negotiation process that will modernize the agreement, establish 21st century standards, and advance fair and reciprocal trade. Our negotiators are working constantly with Canada and Mexico to make progress. There is an established channel that our three governors work through – our three governments work through regularly, and I'm not going to go into the details of ongoing negotiations at this time.

**MODERATOR:** Thank you. We'll take the next question, please.

**OPERATOR:** The next question is from Carrie Kahn with NPR. Please, go ahead.

**QUESTION:** Hi. Thank you. I wanted to know if there's any concern about the – what seems to be the new approach from the President-elect Lopez Obrador's campaign group, that he signaled that he's going to cancel the helicopter contract, the eight helicopters that were on line to be bought by – from Lockheed Martin, and also that he wants to talk more about poverty alleviation instead of joint military operations. Can you talk about your feelings about that and if you're concerned about this new approach?

**SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL:** Yeah. With respect to the two issues that you asked about President-elect Lopez Obrador raising – with regard to the helicopter procurement, that is a Mexican Government process and action. I'd refer you to the Mexican Government on the status of that procurement. And as I said, we look forward to discussing every aspect of the U.S.-Mexico relationship on this trip. There's a broad range of issues that are of mutual interest to our country, to our countries. And I think the Secretary looks forward to spending some time tomorrow with President-elect Lopez Obrador and understanding his agenda.

**MODERATOR:** Thank you. We'll take the next question, please.

**OPERATOR:** The next question is from the line of David Adams with Univision. Please, go ahead.

**QUESTION:** Thank you very much. I just wanted to be clear to a previous question about transnational crime and MS-13. You mentioned that the concern of the administration is the – principally the opioid crisis in the country and the flow of drugs across the border. Were you saying that that's MS-13's responsibility, or is that transnational crime, or is that one and the same thing? I think some people would say that MS-13 – there's not a lot of evidence for MS-13's involvement in drug trafficking across the border.

**SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL:** I appreciate the question. Our two governments work to address the issue of narcotics trafficking through Mexico and across our southern border on a regular basis. Transnational criminal organizations are – there are many that're responsible for many different aspects of the drug trafficking problem. We look forward to working and continuing our work with the Mexican Government to address any and all transnational criminal organizations that are responsible for the heroin entering our country and creating the opioid crisis here.

**MODERATOR:** We'll take the next question, please.

**OPERATOR:** The next question is from the line of Tracy Wilkinson with the *LA Times*. Please, go ahead.

**QUESTION:** Hi. Thank you. [Senior State Department Official], you talked about reinforcing the strength and importance of the ongoing relationship between Mexico and the United States, but the relationship has been so bad this last year and a half, I'm curious about whether – or where – you can find sources of a better understanding, a closer working relationship, anything. I mean, the two countries are in a trade war, tense NAFTA negotiations, a President who insults Mexico routinely. Where do you find a better venue or place for agreement and cooperation?

**SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL:** Tracy, I think the key issue here is that President Trump and President-elect Lopez Obrador had a very positive and constructive phone conversation after the Mexican elections. The whole goal of Secretary Pompeo's trip is to advance that positive agenda and to work with the Mexican Government across all of the issue areas where we can make progress on.

**MODERATOR:** Thank you. We'll take the next question, please.

**OPERATOR:** The next question is from the line of Brett Fortnam with Inside U.S. Trade. Please, go ahead.

**QUESTION:** Hi, and thanks for holding the call. On NAFTA, I notice there aren't any trade officials in the delegation. I was wondering why that was and if – what your response is to the chief NAFTA negotiator for the incoming Mexican Government saying that they would respect a deal negotiated by the Pena Nieto government. Is one expected to be finalized before the transition is complete?

**SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL:** Could you repeat the question? I'm not sure I understood it completely.

**QUESTION:** I was wondering – you mentioned at the top of the call that part of the discussions were going to be to enhance trade. But I noticed there weren't any high-ranking trade officials in the delegation. I was wondering why that was and to what extent NAFTA was going to be discussed and if it is possible to get a deal finalized before the Mexican transition is complete in December.

**SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL:** Okay. Thank you. Again, I want to emphasize that we have a high-level delegation with Senior White House Advisor Kushner on the trip, the DHS Secretary, the Treasury Secretary. This really is a traveling together demonstration of a whole-of-government U.S. approach to the important relationship with Mexico.

As you know, there are established channels that our three governments are working through regularly with regard to the NAFTA negotiation, and I'm really not going to go into the details of the ongoing negotiations. But I can say that Secretary Pompeo and the U.S. delegation will discuss every aspect of the U.S.-Mexico relationship on this trip – not just the commercial and economic matters, but also security, migration, and all the other issues of mutual interest of our country that we – between our countries that we continue to work on on a day-to-day basis.

**MODERATOR:** Thank you. We'll take the last question now, please.

**OPERATOR:** The last question is from Rosiland Jordan with Al Jazeera English. Please, go ahead.

**QUESTION:** Hi. Thanks for the call. Will the Secretary have any time, one, to meet with any civil society groups? And two, do you know whether the Secretary is going to have an opportunity to deal with the question of corruption across various parts of the Mexican Government? Thank you.

**SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL:** Thank you for that question. As I outlined at the beginning of the call, the Secretary will meet with President Pena Nieto, he will meet with President-elect Lopez Obrador, and he will meet with Mexican Foreign Secretary Luis Videgaray. We will, in those meetings, review the ongoing cooperation between our two governments and discuss the relationship with the president-elect. And the Secretary agenda is a very full one for tomorrow. Thank you.

**MODERATOR:** All right. Thank you, everyone, for joining us today, and thank you to [Senior State Department Official] for the background call. We now lift the embargo and remind you that the speaker is – should be attributed as SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL. Thanks, everyone. Have a good afternoon.

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