

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.

The Office of Website Management, Bureau of Public Affairs, manages this site as a portal for information from the U.S. State Department. External links to other Internet sites should not be construed as an endorsement of the views or privacy policies contained therein.