

Press Releases: Interview With Ben Shapiro of The Ben Shapiro Show

Interview
Michael R. Pompeo

Secretary of State

Via Teleconference
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QUESTION: Welcome back. This is the Ben Shapiro Show. We're obviously watching with bated breath everything that is happening in Venezuela, where a standoff seems to have ensued between Juan Guaido, the legitimate leader of Venezuela, and the socialist dictator of Venezuela, the evil dictator, Nicolas Maduro.

Joining us on the line to discuss all of this is Secretary of State Mike Pompeo. Secretary Pompeo, thanks so much for joining the Ben Shapiro Show.

SECRETARY POMPEO: Ben, it's great to be with you today.

QUESTION: So, Secretary, why don't we start with the current situation as you know it in Venezuela. What is the latest on the ground? What's happening over there?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Well, you have to back up just for first principles. You have a country devastated from years and years of socialist thuggery, an economy that can't support feeding children, medicine for kids. And this has now culminated in the Venezuelan people using their constitutional authority to get to a place where we now have a new leader, Juan Guaido, and he is doing battle against Maduro. And what we saw this week was a demonstration of the absence of the ability of Maduro to control his own government. You saw them bring forces into the streets. Everyone has seen those videos. And we've also seen senior leaders inside what is the Maduro-led rump former government all begin to waver, and all begin to talk about how it is they'll get out of the country, who's going to get the golden tickets, how are they going to get out.

We saw that Maduro himself was preparing to depart the country. Over time, Maduro has no capacity to govern. He may get to rule for a little while, but at the end of the day democracy will be restored in Venezuela and the Venezuelan people will have an opportunity to rid themselves of the Cubans, to rid themselves of the Russians, and restore democracy to this nation that

has the capacity to be incredibly wealthy and incredibly democratic.

QUESTION: Well, Secretary Pompeo, as you mentioned at the very end there, the Russians and the Cubans have been heavily involved in Venezuela. I'm frankly bewildered by the media's suggestion – and many members of the Democratic Party – that the United States should stay out in, what, deference to Russia and Cuba? Can you explain to folks how deep the intervention of the Russians and Cubans is in Venezuela right now?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Ben, I kind of laugh sometimes. You'll hear people saying we need to make sure there's not an invasion in Venezuela, and yet there's been one. I mean, it took place. The Cubans invaded some time ago; the Russians have now followed suit. The numbers of Cubans in the security apparatus alone are in the thousands. The Russians have people working over there in the hundreds, if not more. These are the folks who are actually controlling the direction of travel for Venezuela. We've seen that failure even today. It's largely Cuban security forces that are protecting Maduro in his hiding place. He talked yesterday about having nerves of steel. That's easier to do when you're surrounded by Cuban military people and you're hiding in a bunker.

They are deep. They've controlled the economy; they have looted the nation. They've demanded that Venezuela provide to Cuba essentially discount oil for years and years, harming the Venezuelan people. The Cubans have been there and are deeply embedded, have been for years, and the Russians have been there as well, largely protecting their economic interests.

QUESTION: Secretary Pompeo, one of the criticisms that has been – or levied against the American government has been made by people, including Representative Ilhan Omar of Minnesota, who have suggested – many people on the left seem to be suggesting that American sanctions – that America bears responsibility for the situation in Venezuela. I was hoping maybe you could debunk this silly myth that it was American sanctions that led to the collapse of civil society in Venezuela.

SECRETARY POMPEO: Ben, there's always elements of – in the United States that are the blame-America-first crowd. This is factually unfounded in the most troubling way. It's deeply disturbing that someone would say something like that. The challenges that face the Venezuelan people today are years and years in the making, long before American sanctions were put in place months and months ago, whether that was putting military individuals in charge of their oil wealth – the largest known substantiated oil reserves in the world belong to Venezuela. Not the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, not the United States, not Russia, but Venezuela, and they put a general in charge, and of course it falls into disrepair. The corruption, the kleptocracy, is legion, and that all long predates Americans' effort – America's effort to build out a 54-nation coalition to restore democracy. To suggest that the troubles – when there are 200 metric tons of food sitting on the Venezuelan border that came from the taxpayers of the United States of America through our good graces – to suggest somehow that America is remotely connected to the harm befalling the Venezuelan people is sick and dangerous.

QUESTION: We're speaking with Secretary of State Mike Pompeo.

Secretary Pompeo, now there's been a lot of controversy surrounding comments by you, members of the administration, suggesting that all options, including possible military intervention, are on the table with regard to Venezuela. Where do we stand on that, and what is the position of the administration with regard to the possibility of military intervention in Venezuela?

SECRETARY POMPEO: The President has been unambiguous. He talked last night about – or the night before last about how we're going to approach the Cubans, the challenges, the costs that we're going to impose on Cuban leadership such that they depart Venezuela, but has also made very, very clear that military action is something that we are prepared to use that is an option.

I'm the Secretary of State. We are doing – using all of our diplomatic and political tools to try and resolve this crisis in a way that is peaceful to restore democracy in a way that creates the least violent situation with the least persons injured and harmed. But I think the Venezuelan people are demanding. I think it is morally correct to make sure that in the event that we can find no other way, that American use of military power is something we will simply not rule out.

QUESTION: So I was hoping that maybe you could express the American interest in Venezuela. So I've heard people on the isolationist right as well as the isolationist and progressive left suggesting that America doesn't really tremendous interests in Venezuela. Why should the American people care about what's happening in Venezuela other than the simple humanitarian concern for suffering people?

SECRETARY POMPEO: First, I think that's significant in its own right, but there are certainly additional reasons that America cares deeply about restoring democracy to Venezuela. We need other democratic nations that are prepared to engage and freely trade. The risk from migrants we see today in Colombia, numbering in the 1.5 million, the risk of migrants moving, leaving those places, having to leave their homes, is real.

America also has a deep interest in ensuring that countries that are adverse to the United States, who are desirous of putting America at risk – countries like Cuba, countries like Russia – don't continue to have the foothold that they have literally hundreds of miles from our shores. I don't want to get in too much detail, but their capacity to know what's going on here in the United States, to use that platform to hold Americans at risk, is something that's simply not acceptable and would be deeply adverse to the United States' interests.

QUESTION: We're speaking with Secretary of State Mike Pompeo.

Secretary Pompeo, I want to switch topics for just a moment and talk about the situation in Yemen. Obviously, there's a lot of controversy surrounding America's involvement in Yemen. Again, the big question that is raised is: Why should Americans care about what happens in Yemen? Why should we be

expending any efforts on behalf of the Saudi government, for example, in Yemen in the middle of what seems to be an internecine warfare – internecine war between Sunni and Shia? So what is the situation in Yemen? And the President has made pretty obvious his interest in being involved. Why should America be involved in Yemen?

SECRETARY POMPEO: So were this a simple civil war in Yemen, it would be difficult to justify America having any involvement, but sadly, that's not the case. This is terrain in which al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula exists. They have some of their most sophisticated capability at performing operations that are external. That is, external planning groups are sitting in parts of Yemen today. We have an obligation to protect America, to take down that al-Qaida terrorist threat that is on inside of Yemen.

Moreover, we have the Iranians using Yemen as a platform, a platform to hold ships transiting through the strait and around and through the waters that surround Yemen, both to the south of Yemen and to the west of Yemen, holding American ships, ships sailing through those seas, at risk. We also have Iranian platforms, unarmed – unmanned, armed aerial vehicles as well as missile systems launching missiles into Riyadh and into the Emirates, where Americans travel frequently. There are real security risks. The Saudis have a unambiguous right to defend themselves from attacks out of Yemen, and it is not the Houthis but rather the Iranians that are responsible for that.

QUESTION: My final question for you, Secretary Pompeo, because I know you have to run. Obviously, you're a busy man. I wanted to ask you about the reports of a dramatic rise in anti-Semitism across the world. Today, of course, marks *Yom HaShoah*, Holocaust Remembrance Day. I was wondering if you had any words on the threat to Jews both in the United States as well as internationally in the midst of what seems to be a radical rise in anti-Semitism from a lot of different sides of various aisles.

SECRETARY POMPEO: Ben, you have that right. Anti-Semitism can come from a number of directions, and sadly, it is indeed on the rise. It's on the rise in Europe. You see the Corbynites, the Corbyn folks in the United Kingdom. You see the risk in France, and sadly, here in the United States as well. We all know the history, and we each have an individual obligation to do all that we can to push back, certainly against the violence, and keeping people secure and safe, but also against the rhetoric, against the language, the anti-Semitic language that can be used, which causes others to engage in that violence. It's deeply troubling to see this rise. I've spoken about this with great frequency. The President has as well. We're determined to push back against it not only here in the United States of America but around the world as well.

QUESTION: Well, Secretary Pompeo, thank you so much for your time. I really appreciate, obviously, all your hard work. The world's a dangerous place, and we need people like you making sure that the policy is done right. Thanks so much for your time, Secretary Pompeo.

SECRETARY POMPEO: That's very kind, Ben. Thank you, sir. Have a good day. So long.

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