

Press Releases: Interview With Bret Baier of Fox News

Interview
Michael R. Pompeo

Secretary of State

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QUESTION: Earlier today, I asked the secretary about efforts by some European allies to help Iran circumvent U.S. sanctions.

SECRETARY POMPEO: Bret, we have made clear since our withdrawal from the JCPOA that we thought it was a horrible deal and one that was not good not only for America but good for the Europeans as well. We've encouraged them to leave the deal since the very day that we did. The Europeans have chosen something different, and we've urged them too not to disrupt the sanctions regime that's out there. They've now come up with this thing called the SPV. I'm very hopeful that it'll be what they say it is and no more, where – a place where unsanctioned goods, humanitarian aid, can move through. If that's the case, it'll have nearly no impact on the important deliverable from our sanctions, which is to deny Qasem Soleimani and his terrorist regime the resources to inflict so much terror and tragedy all around the world.

QUESTION: So what beyond sanctions does the U.S. want Europe to do on Iran?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Bret, they've actually over the last month, done more than they had done in all the previous time before. We've begun to – begun to have good discussions around the missile program and how we might deny Iran the capability to develop their missiles. The Germans shut down Mahan Air from traveling; it's an airline that is connected to the Qods Force, the Iranian Qods Force, the terror element of the Iranian army. Other European countries have called out the Iranians for their assassination campaign that continues to take place throughout Europe. These are things that the Europeans had been disinclined to do before and now they're doing.

I must say, this ministerial that we had with 60-plus countries, we talked about Iran a fair amount, and not a single country objected to the fact base. They all understood the threat that we collectively face throughout the world from the Islamic Republic of Iran and were committed to jointly figuring out

the best ways to push back against it and reduce that risk.

QUESTION: Is one of the ways to try to sabotage Iran's missile program?

SECRETARY POMPEO: I don't talk about lots of the activities that countries may take covertly. But make no mistake about it, America is using all of its levers of power to reduce the capacity for Iran to build out a missile program. Look, we see what happens when countries join up a nuclear program with the capacity to deliver those nuclear warheads at long range, whether it's through an ICBM missile or one of even shorter range. We are – we're doing everything we can to slow down Iran's capacity to build out those missiles, and we've done it with the blessing of the UN Security Council under 2231, the UN resolution. It's very clear that Iran is violating that by building out its missiles, and we're working to stop it.

QUESTION: Yeah, because some of those, a lot of those rocket launches, are failing lately.

Why did the Trump administration wait until yesterday to talk about this former U.S. Air Force intelligence specialist defecting to Iran in 2013?

SECRETARY POMPEO: I'll have to defer to the Department of Justice on that. It's a criminal prosecution, and I just don't have anything I can add for you there, Bret.

QUESTION: Do you have a sense of Iranian spies working this way inside the U.S.?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Make no mistake about it, the Iranian intelligence service – both the IRGC's intelligence service and their main MOIS, their main intelligence service – are working actively not only against the United States but working against European countries, working against Arab states. They are a powerful intelligence service and one that our intelligence service, that I used to have the privilege to run, is working hard to make sure does no damage to the United States of America.

QUESTION: I know you can't get into specifics, but I mean, is there a broad estimate how much – how many spies Iran has inside the U.S.?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Bret, if there's one, there's too many.

QUESTION: I want to talk to you about a couple more things. One is North Korea. We're nearly six months after Singapore, obviously heading towards Vietnam. The Vice President acknowledged the U.S. is still waiting on North Korea to take concrete steps to dismantle its weapons. What does the U.S. need to see from North Korea to say there's progress here on that front?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Yeah, I think the Vice President summed it up pretty well, Bret. We've had some good things that followed from the Singapore summit. We haven't had a missile test; there haven't been the testing of nuclear explosive devices. Those are good things. But the ultimate objective, the complete and final denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula, there's still a lot of work to do. And we hope – I guess it's only two weeks off now. We hope

when the two leaders get together again they can make substantial progress along that objective, which I think the entire world shares.

QUESTION: How much does the formal ending of the Korean War factor in?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Bret, it's something we've had a lot of talks about. In fact, my team will redeploy to Asia here in a day or two to continue conversations around all elements that were discussed back in Singapore. Remember we not only discussed denuclearization, but we talked about creating security mechanisms, peace mechanisms on the Korean Peninsula. I hope the two leaders have a chance to talk about that as well. I fully expect that they will. We also talked about a brighter future for the North Korean people, if we can successfully get the result that Chairman Kim promised President Trump. Remember he made that commitment that they would denuclearize. And so we hope to make real progress along each of those elements of what the two leaders agreed to back in June.

QUESTION: But there is a time or something on the calendar that says we're going to wait this long, and if Kim does nothing on denuclearization, we're going back to maximum pressure. Is that still in the cards?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Bret, one of the core principles of the Trump doctrine is we don't tell our adversaries what we're going to do. And so we've had lots of conversations about how we hope this proceeds, but I just don't have anything I can say about a deadline like you're supposing.

QUESTION: The President is going to say that almost all of the ISIS caliphate in Syria is gone, we're hearing. What happens to the foreign fighters in Syria whose countries refuse to take them back in?

SECRETARY POMPEO: It's a real challenge. It's one of the reasons my team's been working now for weeks to get each of those countries to agree to take back the foreign terrorist fighters that traveled to Syria from their nation. And so we're continuing to work. We've had some successes. We've already had some returns. We need to make sure that we have a solution, and there are many options on the table. I don't want to discuss them further here, but there's many options on the table about how we might address it.

But the most important thing, Bret, we've got soldiers, sailors, airmen, and Marines that did good work to take these terrorists from the battlefield. We cannot let them out. We can't let their children have to recapture these folks. It's unacceptable. It presents real risk to the United States, and the Trump administration is determined to prevent that from happening.

QUESTION: Afghanistan. How long are you prepared to sit at the peace table with the Taliban?

SECRETARY POMPEO: We've made real progress, not just with the Taliban but with other Afghans as well. I think they all have a view that 17 years of death and misery is not in the best interest of their nation. I will say that other countries around the world too see that that's not in their best interest. And so Ambassador Khalilzad, under my direction and the direction

of President Trump, is actively engaged to see if we can't find a means by which we can get a political resolution in Afghanistan that provides the security elements that are so richly needed and a political solution that can ultimately take down the risk that Afghanistan has presented to the United States for now 17-odd years.

QUESTION: Last thing, Mr. Secretary. Up on Capitol Hill there's been some recent votes, including by Senate Republicans, on Saudi Arabia and Yemen, on war powers, on Russia sanctions, at some points undercutting the President's foreign policy. Is this a growing trend, and what do you think about it?

SECRETARY POMPEO: I must say the conversations I have on Capitol Hill are, in most cases, supportive of what the administration is doing. There's places that various senators disagree. You highlighted a couple. But the policy on Venezuela is – goodness – nearly unanimously accepted as being a good policy. The threat that China poses to the United States is widely recognized as making sense. I think President Trump has real support for most of the foreign policy objectives that we've laid out over these first two years.

On those others, we'll continue to work with members of Congress. On Yemen, I must say I'm surprised. To the extent we prohibit things taking place in Yemen, we're only benefiting the Iranians. They're the ones that have caused all the strife. The humanitarian crisis is a direct responsibility of Iranian bad behavior. And I think as we continue to inform members on Capitol Hill of that fact, they'll come to see it the way that President Trump does.

QUESTION: Mr. Secretary, we appreciate your time. Safe travels.

SECRETARY POMPEO: Thank you, Bret. We'll see you before too long. So long.

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