

Press Releases: Interview With Brian Kilmeade of Fox and Friends

Interview
Michael R. Pompeo

Secretary of State

Treaty Room
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QUESTION: So, Mr. Secretary, great to see you.

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

QUESTION: There's, like, four stories that happened on my way here to Washington to interview you, one of which was the testimony this morning in front of a Senate committee where the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Dunford made it clear that indirectly, Google is helping the Chinese military with their technology. This is the same Google that said no to a Pentagon contract back in 2018 and they testified to it today, much to the amazement of many on Capitol Hill. What's your reaction to that?

SECRETARY POMPEO: So I don't have much to add. I know what Chairman Dunford said this morning. He's got it exactly right for sure. But I'll speak to this more broadly: We need global companies to come to the realization of the threat that China presents. Certainly American companies need to recognize that too. And when they're working here in the United States, they certainly need to treat the United States at least as good as they treat the Chinese companies with which they interact, and I think that's what Chairman Dunford was getting to this morning.

QUESTION: And I think also, keeping on the China topic, yesterday you went out of your way to point out that their human rights record is terrible. You said they're in a class of their own –

SECRETARY POMPEO: Yeah, a league of their own, yes.

QUESTION: – the way they treat the Muslims, the Uighurs, and everyone in their midst. And they responded saying the U.S. should worry basically about their own human rights record.

SECRETARY POMPEO: So I hadn't seen that response, but it's both unfortunate

and pretty typical of the way they treat their fellow human beings there. This is one of the worst human rights countries that we've seen since the 1930s. The magnitude and the scale of this is truly of a global proportion. Whether it's the Uighurs that are in one part of the country or Christians or other religions in other parts of the country, they don't honor that religious diversity, the religious freedom. And I must say I'm incredibly proud of how we do it in the – how we treat human beings here in the United States. We make mistakes, we're imperfect, but there's no nation in the history of civilization that has had the human rights record that we have here today. We should be very proud of it. The Trump administration has continued in that tradition.

QUESTION: There's also a report coming here today that it looks like the President and President Xi, if they are to meet at Mar-a-Lago, it's not going to happen until at the earliest mid-April. What could you tell us? I know trade is not your area, but you're very familiar with the magnitude of this event and what it could mean for overall these two superpowers to meet. What's going on here?

SECRETARY POMPEO: So real progress has been made. I think that's absolutely true. I think both leaders want to make sure that we've had enough progress so that the two seniors, President Xi and President Trump, can get together and close out any of the remaining items. I think they should do that. I think they should do it at a time when they're both comfortable that they can get there. But I've watched these trade talks progress. There's real progress that's been made and I'm hopeful, whether it's the beginning of April, the middle of April, or if it even takes a couple weeks longer, we ought to get this right. These trade relationships matter. That's why President Trump took them on. And I'm very hopeful that the two leaders can come together to get a trade deal that will benefit not only America, but the rest of the world as well.

QUESTION: Mr. Secretary, some have speculated – and we're – I'm on the outside – that seeing you and the President walk away in Hanoi made them worry that they could come all the way out to Florida or Washington and walk away with nothing, which would be an embarrassment to the Chinese.

SECRETARY POMPEO: Yeah, I don't know if that's true or not.

QUESTION: What do you think?

SECRETARY POMPEO: I can tell you from the experience in Hanoi the President was doing the right thing for the American people. He had America's security, Americans' interest at the core of his decision-making process. And so when a deal was presented that didn't make sense for America or, frankly, for our South Korean and Japanese partners, he walked away from it and made the decision not to take that deal. I'm sure the rest of the world observed that and recognizes the seriousness with which President Trump takes protecting Americans.

QUESTION: Because of the time change, we were on live, and next thing you know, you're on stage and it's early and the itinerary's blown up. And I'm

watching you on stage. You do a great job keeping a poker face, but as the President spoke and talked about the deal you weren't going to have, do you feel personally that you let him down?

SECRETARY POMPEO: I don't. I think we made real progress even in Hanoi, even in a place where we didn't reach the final resolution of what we've been asking for all along. We didn't get an agreement for the full and final denuclearization in a verified way, but I think we made progress. In the weeks in the run-up, we learned a lot about the North Koreans' position. In the days afterwards, I think we've learned a little bit more still. This is a long process. The President's always said if we can keep missiles from flying and keep nuclear tests from happening, that's a good first start. We know what the final objective is.

QUESTION: And do you feel as though – riding back on that plane, did you say to yourself, "What is everyone going to say about this?"

SECRETARY POMPEO: I don't spend a lot of time worrying about what others say. They'll critique. They'll have their own views. I'm confident that President Trump and our administration got this one right.

QUESTION: Middlebury Institute has gotten everybody's attention, featured on various shows, for what they've been able to reveal from satellite photos about the development of rockets and what the North Koreans were doing and not doing. And according to Jeff Lewis, they had indications even before Hanoi that they were beginning to rebuild some launching sites and testing engine sites. If that is indeed true, did that play into the fact that you felt as though perhaps the North Koreans weren't serious about a deal and were playing delay of game? Did you have that same information?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Well, Brian, I don't want to talk about the intelligence that we had, but I think the American people know we knew precisely what was going on inside of North Korea, not just at those sites you've referred to, but other places as well. We know what's been happening, saw the UN report talking about the fact that there are violations of the UN Security Council resolutions taking place. We went in there with full knowledge and eyes wide open. The President's decision, though, to take the offer, which was one part of their nuclear effort, the facility at Yongbyon, which would have left missiles and warheads and other elements where they could still enrich uranium – all of those things were still going to be there. And in exchange for that, they asked for the near-total elimination of all the sanctions. That just wasn't something that made much sense and the President communicated that.

QUESTION: And the fact is since that time, there's more indications they're about to set up some rockets. If something like that happens, what would that do to relations? What other arrow do you have in your quiver to send a message that would maybe bring us back to where you were when you took over?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Boy, I think we're in a better place than when we took over, so I don't frankly want to go back to where we were.

QUESTION: But what if the rockets go off? What if a missile goes over Japan again?

SECRETARY POMPEO: I don't want to – I don't want to forecast what we will do or what we might not do in the event that that happened. That would be most unfortunate and I think Chairman Kim understands that. He told President Trump in Hanoi that he wouldn't go back to that. He wouldn't go back to firing at – firing rockets and missiles or conducting nuclear tests. We hope he'll stay to his word.

QUESTION: We also know that the Russians are cheating – this video of them offloading cargo to a North Korean ship. So they're breaking the sanctions. How can you get the message across to the North Koreans if the Chinese and Russians are ignoring the sanctions to a degree?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Yeah. So there are absolutely sanctions violations and we are absolutely determined to stop as many of them as we can.

QUESTION: Have you expressed it?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Oh my goodness, yes. Now, the Chinese know this, the Russians know this. We've shared the things we know about the violations. I will say this: We have the best sanctions enforcement, even the Chinese and the Russians, that we've had at any time in the history of this problem set. It's been a global effort. These UN Security Council resolutions were voted on by every country. So while we're not perfect and these sanctions aren't being perfectly enforced, we're in pretty good shape and we're going to redouble our efforts.

QUESTION: All I have to do is go on social media and I saw your message to the Venezuelan people and basically saying hey, I got your back, I understand what you're going through and be patient. How much more garbage do they have to eat before America gets more directly involved?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Boy, it is – I'm pausing only because when I think about how bad it is today and what I know it's going to be like tomorrow and the day after that, it's going to get worse. The Maduro regime is truly evil, denying food to the hungry, denying medicine to the sick. We've delivered – the American people have been so generous – 200 metric tons of food on their borders they won't let in. We are continuing to take efforts. We had our team land back in the United States just a few hours ago to get them safely out of Venezuela. We're committed to this effort. I don't want to forecast what the President may do, but he's been very clear that we're considering every tool in the American arsenal to achieve victory for Venezuelan democracy and to get Maduro to leave.

QUESTION: Have we put troops into Colombia ready to act, should they need to be – need to act?

SECRETARY POMPEO: It's a fine question and I'll let the Department of Defense talk about the movements of their soldiers.

QUESTION: So you're passing the question?

SECRETARY POMPEO: I am, yes.

QUESTION: In Afghanistan, right now we understand that there is a draft agreement on two key issues: withdrawal of U.S. troops from Afghanistan and the Taliban's pledge to cut ties with these terror – with terror groups, al-Qaida. Can you confirm that?

SECRETARY POMPEO: I can't. There's no deal at this point. We don't have final resolution there. But we are working towards a political reconciliation. We've been hard at it. Ambassador Khalilzad has been on the ground in Doha for six or eight days, back I think yesterday. We've made some progress both with the Afghan Government and with the Taliban. We now need them to talk to each other. The President's made clear his objective here: He wants to end this endless war, but he wants to do it in a way that we don't increase risk to the United States from terror acts coming from Afghanistan. I believe we can achieve both of those goals.

QUESTION: Mr. Secretary, he made clear he wants to get out. Didn't he help – didn't he hurt the ambassador in trying to get a peace agreement knowing the objective is to get out?

SECRETARY POMPEO: We've made more progress since that story leaked than we have made in the nine years prior in getting towards reconciliation.

QUESTION: Is it true that members of the Taliban Five that we let out of Gitmo – not you, but the previous administration let out of Gitmo – that are – they are part of these peace talks right now, the ones who we exchanged for Bowe Bergdahl, many of which are described as the worst of the worst, many of which described their relationship with both bin Ladin and Mullah Omar? Is that true?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Brian, I don't want to answer who's been showing up there. I will say this.

QUESTION: Is that acceptable if they are?

SECRETARY POMPEO: I'll say this. We've negotiated with some really bad people. I was in Hanoi talking to a regime that has caused enormous harm to its own people. The State Department doesn't often get to choose exactly who it is. We're trying to achieve good security outcomes for the American people. Sometimes we end up talking to some really bad folks.

QUESTION: And they would be okay to stay in that room with – as far as you're concerned?

SECRETARY POMPEO: If we can deliver security for the American people, we'll talk to just about anyone.

QUESTION: But the Taliban have captured an entire Afghan force company of 50. They killed 70 the week before. Are we dealing from weakness?

SECRETARY POMPEO: I don't believe that at all, and neither do the leaders on the ground, including General Miller, who's commanding Resolute Support. I

believe we're not dealing from weakness. We're not naive. We know precisely who it is we're sitting across the table from, whether that's in Korea or Iran or in Afghanistan. We know who these people are and we're picking points where America can be more secure.

QUESTION: Mr. Secretary, you're a West Point guy. You're a military guy with CIA experience post-Congress.

SECRETARY POMPEO: That was a few years ago.

QUESTION: But you have that military training that 99 percent of the country doesn't have, and you served. You know that Pakistan is the problem. You know they're training, arming, and equipping, and without them the Taliban are vapor. How much longer are we going to put up with this?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Well, we've taken actions against Pakistan that no other administration has taken. I do see this. I see this from – I've had friends killed. You have too, I'm sure. Lots of New Yorkers were killed when those towers came down. I've not forgotten the lesson from 9/11. We need Pakistan to do more. They have to stop harboring these terrorists. We saw what happened with India, the conflict that arose there as a result of terrorists that departed from Pakistan. We need the Pakistanis to step up. They need to stop harboring terrorists.

QUESTION: You told – going back to China for a second, you told the Poles, you told the Germans do not do a deal with Huawei. It's about 5G, it's about security. It looks like they're going through it anyway. What would happen if both of our allies decide to go with a Chinese company to lead the way on 5G? And can you tell the American people why that matters so much?

SECRETARY POMPEO: I certainly can. Huawei and Chinese telecommunications equipment in one's network, in a nation's network, presents a real risk that the Chinese Government will have access to data that no American wants them to have. And so when you talk about this happening in countries like Poland or Germany or the UK, we're very concerned about that – not only for American national security, because we have information stored there too, but for the security of their own peoples. We have urged these countries to reconsider those policies. We view this technology as being threatening to their security, and we've told them. If you put this technology in your equipment, it will make it incredibly difficult for the United States to work alongside you in some of these places.

QUESTION: Mr. Secretary, they're not listening because Angela Merkel says we'll handle our own intelligence, thank you, and they still have that natural gas pipeline coming from Vladimir Putin into their country. The President told them it's not a good idea; you've told them it's not a good idea. Why are our allies ignoring us?

SECRETARY POMPEO: So there's more work to do. We've made progress on lots of fronts. We've had some places where we still have work to do, Brian. I agree with you. I wish Nord Stream 2 was something that the Germans would understand presented risk to the German people. While they're asking America

to support them, they're handing resources and money to the Russians. They ought not to build it. We're using American power everywhere we can to push back against these challenges.

QUESTION: Everyone's talking about global warming and the threat to this country. When you look at the top five threats to this nation, where do you rank global warming or climate change?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Yeah, I wouldn't put it in the top five.

QUESTION: Why?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Because I can count to five that get you to things that present more risk to the people I used to represent in Kansas and citizens all across America, whether it's the threat that we've talked about today from China, the nuclear proliferation risk that extends from Pakistan, through all those folks who have these weapon systems – places like North Korea where they can sell these weapons. I think I'm at five already, but I could give you a whole list of threats that I think we can effect change on in a way that will really make a difference for the security of the American people.

QUESTION: Before I came in here, it became clear the Republicans have jumped ship and decided to not vote on a vote with a piece of legislation that does not go along with the President's need for emergency money at the border. You used to be in Congress. What – you're also a Harvard Law guy. So, constitutionally, was the President out of bounds? Do you side with the 59 that voted against the President or do you side with the 41 that voted with him?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Count me in the 41.

QUESTION: Why?

SECRETARY POMPEO: I've spent a lot of time with my Mexican counterparts. This challenge at our southern border is real. I believe it's a crisis. But call it what you will, the challenge of not knowing who's coming in and out of our country and what drugs or people or illicit materials might be coming across our southern border is real and we need to take serious action against it, and the President's executive order does just that.

QUESTION: Should you do more with the Guatemalan Government – Jimmy Morales, who evidently has an affinity for the President, for this country – to stop, to stem the tide? A lot – most of these guys are coming from places like –

SECRETARY POMPEO: That is right. These are mostly not Mexican citizens who are coming across today. They're coming out of the Northern Triangle countries, from Honduras and from Guatemala. We're working hard. We're trying to both convince them they have to take this seriously and help them develop the capacity to do so.

QUESTION: As I walked in here, for the first time since 2014, if my stats are correct, Israeli – the rockets came out of Gaza into Israel. What's your

reaction to that?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Boy. I saw the reports as well. I've not been able to confirm them other than I had an initial report that said that there were two rockets, that they came out of Gaza, and that there weren't any injuries. The Israelis have the right to defend themselves. I'm confident that they will be able to do that. I regret that the folks in the Gaza Strip – probably Hamas, although I suppose we shouldn't speculate – fired these rockets and put Israelis at risk. This only presents an increased risk of escalation, something that we hope doesn't happen, but you should know we will support the Israelis' right to defend themselves.

QUESTION: Do you worry how much the anti-Israeli, anti-Semitic language coming out – mostly the Democratic side – in Congress hurts long-term the Israeli-American relations?

SECRETARY POMPEO: I do. I'm worried about it for multiple reasons, not just the relationship between these two democracies, but I worry about it because it undermines where we began today, Brian – the protection of the dignity and rights and the religious freedom of every human being. And so when I hear anti-Semitic remarks, it saddens me, and I know it undermines what is the greatest about the United States of America.

QUESTION: So I viewed a story on you today. They talked about why is the Secretary of State doing so much traveling in the country, from Iowa to Texas to Kansas. Is he running for president, is he running for Senate? Why? With all the problems we have, why are you traveling –

SECRETARY POMPEO: So, Brian, I've seen these stories. I suppose everybody gets unhappy when I don't go to Martha's Vineyard like my predecessors did. They traveled domestically too. America is our first client, and I wanted to go out to Iowa to talk about China and trade and why it matters. I went to Texas this week to talk about energy and how American innovation and creativity have created enormous wealth for America and increased America's geostrategic capacity because we now don't have to import as much energy. And I'm going back to Kansas next week to talk about entrepreneurship. I'm doing this on behalf of America. I'm very focused on what I'm doing here today.

QUESTION: Are you ruling out running for Senate in Kansas?

SECRETARY POMPEO: I have. I've told folks I'm not going to do that.

QUESTION: Long-term, would I be surprised in 2024 if you're running for President?

SECRETARY POMPEO: I don't know if you'd be, but my wife would be shocked. (Laughter.)

QUESTION: But your classmates probably wouldn't. And lastly, I understand you're making a trip to the Middle East.

SECRETARY POMPEO: I am. Next week I'll be headed off to the Middle East.

QUESTION: What's the objective? Where are you going?

SECRETARY POMPEO: So threefold set of objectives. I'll be traveling to Kuwait, I'll be traveling to Lebanon, and then I'll be traveling to Israel. In each of those places, a different mission set, but the common thing in each of those places is helping those countries bolster their efforts to push back against the Islamic Republic of Iran.

QUESTION: And that's going to be the focus. Iraq and Iran meeting, forging relationships; Iraq's ignoring the sanctions, and Grand Ayatollah Sistani sat down with the president of Iran. It seems like in terms of soft power, diplomatic power, we're getting our butts kicked over there. What's happening?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Yeah, I don't see it that way. America has been a strong supporter of Iraq. We still are working to take down ISIS in their country. I had a conversation with their prime minister just a couple days back. I think we're making progress on developing a strong, independent, sovereign Iraq, but there is no doubt Iran has its eyes set on taking control of that country. I don't think that's good for the Iraqi people, I know it's not good for the United States of America, and we're going to continue to do the CT fight there and stand up an Iraqi Government that's free and less involved with what's going on in Iran.

QUESTION: There is a parliament member that says we don't have a diplomatic game right now in Iraq.

SECRETARY POMPEO: I disagree fundamentally. I know precisely what the diplomatic game is there, and if the Senate will confirm my ambassador, we'll step it up even more.

QUESTION: That would help. Last question. Your predecessor famously basically admitted that he called the President a moron. You have a much different relationship with him. What does he not get that you get?

SECRETARY POMPEO: You mean what does my – what did my predecessor not get?

QUESTION: Yeah.

SECRETARY POMPEO: Ah, got it.

QUESTION: What is it that you understand about the President?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Yeah. Boy, I don't know. My relationship with the President is one that's an effort on my part to execute his vision for America's foreign policy. He's the Commander-in-Chief. He provides the direction; I go out every day and work my tail off to try and execute it and implement it for him. We talk just about every day, either in person or on the phone, so that I know what it is he's thinking so that when I'm out talking with my foreign counterparts, the world knows I'm speaking a message that President Trump wants spoken.

QUESTION: How did he win you over? You were originally with somebody else.

What is it about President Trump that you said, "I'm all in"?

SECRETARY POMPEO: He won and was delivering on behalf of the American people an agenda that far outstripped any other opportunity. I was very proud to accept the offer to be his director of Central Intelligence, or the CIA director. I enjoyed my time there and I'm enjoying being the Secretary of State as well.

QUESTION: And you've taken a vow not to sleep or relax for at least four years?

SECRETARY POMPEO: For a little while.

QUESTION: All right. Thanks so much, Mr. Secretary.

SECRETARY POMPEO: Thank you very much, sir.

QUESTION: Congratulations.

SECRETARY POMPEO: Thank you.

(Break.)

QUESTION: Mr. Secretary, thanks so much for your time. Thanks for a few minutes before you're off to another visit somewhere.

SECRETARY POMPEO: Thank you.

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