

Press Releases: Interview With Chris Mitchell and David Brody of Christian Broadcasting Network

Interview
Michael R. Pompeo

Secretary of State

David Citadel Hotel
Jerusalem
March 21, 2019

QUESTION: Secretary Pompeo, thanks for doing this. Appreciate it.

SECRETARY POMPEO: It's great to be with you. Great to be with you both.

QUESTION: The Western Wall – was there with you. What was that experience like and how impactful was something like that?

SECRETARY POMPEO: So I've been there before, but this was incredibly special. To be there with the Israeli prime minister and ambassador from the United States to Israel was really an important moment. It was special for me as a Christian. It was special I think to show the commitment the United States has to this democracy, this Jewish nation of Israel.

QUESTION: Speaking of that, you talked yesterday – you talked about being a man of faith. We know you're a man of faith. You talked about that yesterday, and I'm wondering about that apex between Israel and Christianity, and the Bible coming alive in this land. Can you talk about that a little bit and what that's all about, the relationship between the two?

SECRETARY POMPEO: So here we are in Jerusalem, the city that's so important to all three Abrahamic religions. Certainly today I was at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre as well. I got to see that; was the second time I had a chance to do that in my life. As a Christian, to go to that place that is so fundamental to the things you believe is just a very special thing. And at the same time, I'm the Secretary of State, tasked with defending the Constitution, supporting the President in his mission to keep our nation safe and to keep Israel safe. It's really quite something to be here and have this opportunity to travel to a place like the Western Wall, with all its history. We had a chance to go down and see some of the tunnels, the excavation that's been done there as well. That history reminds you of the

history of the Jewish people here on this land; it reminds you of all of the rich religious traditions here in this place and how special Jerusalem really is. It makes you even more proud of the decision President Trump made to designate this and to show that this is truly the capital of Israel.

QUESTION: And that happened just over a year ago when –

SECRETARY POMPEO: It seems like a long time ago.

QUESTION: I know. And making history, and a lot of evangelicals and Israelis were ecstatic about moving the U.S. embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, but some are concerned about what might happen or what price they might pay in the peace plan that's upcoming right now. So they're concerned about that. What can you do to allay their fears of something like dividing Jerusalem in the upcoming peace plan?

SECRETARY POMPEO: So I've seen the details of the plan as it stands now. I'm sure there'll be things moved just a bit as time goes on, but evangelicals of the world should know that this is a vision for what might ultimately lead to this resolution of this conflict. I think we all want a better life for the Palestinian people; we want a path where the Palestinians and the Israelis aren't in conflict. That would be good for the region, good for Jerusalem, good for the world, and I think this plan presents a vision for that but doesn't sacrifice any of these core principles, frankly, of any of the faiths.

QUESTION: As we do rapid fire, let's move to the United States for a moment and anti-Semitism and the Democrats. They seem embroiled in this. There was a – I don't want to say a veiled shot, not that it was a shot, but at Ilhan Omar about the bigotry and anti-Semitism inside the halls of Capitol Hill. What – how concerned are you about the rise of not just anti-Semitism around the world but in that Democrat Party as well?

SECRETARY POMPEO: To see this from a member of Congress like Congresswoman Omar is – I talked about this being dark. The rise of anti-Semitism in the United States and in Europe and in, frankly, all across the world is something that is deeply troubling, and to see someone – a duly elected congressman – behave in that way, to speak about anti-Semitism in that way, is of great concern. It's a great concern to me. This administration speaks the truth, and anti-Semitism is unacceptable in any form from anyone, but to see it come from one of America's leaders is just abhorrent.

QUESTION: Mr. Secretary, back here in the Middle East, you're heading to Lebanon, the last leg of your trip, and yet Lebanon is dominated in many ways by Hizballah, with maybe more than 100,000 rockets, building tunnels into the Northern Galilee, and setting up a military infrastructure on the Golan Heights or trying to, anyway. What can you do and the U.S. do to reduce this threat to Israel and to Lebanon itself?

SECRETARY POMPEO: That's a great question, and that's certainly part of my mission when I travel to Lebanon. It's unfortunate. For the last decade, the previous administration, Hizballah was permitted to grow – to grow its

capabilities, to grow its resources almost unchecked, and to seep its way into Lebanese politics. The Lebanese people don't want that. They deserve better. This is a nation with a rich, deep tradition, and so our mission – the reason I'm going there – is to show them what America is prepared to do to help to push back against the threat from Hizballah; to tell them that getting anywhere near Hassan Nasrallah, the leader of Hizballah, is of great risk to their nation; and then to work on some of the security aspects of the relationship as well to make sure they understand the threat that Hizballah's military power inside of Lebanon poses to that entire country.

QUESTION: Staying here in the Middle East, northeast Syria's been in the news a lot in the last couple of months, and you know there's a new democracy there that represents all the people, protects religious freedom and Christians, and even puts a priority on the role of women. What can you tell those people, that new government and many of the Christians there, about what the U.S. will do to protect that new democracy, even as it's surrounded by many countries that are threatening that area?

SECRETARY POMPEO: So when we think about Syria in the Trump administration, we think about the entire region, right, extending from Iraq all the way to the Mediterranean. We were just talking about Lebanon. The challenges in Syria remain. The United States intends to remain. We are close to the destruction of the caliphate. It will be completed very, very soon. But the threat from radical Islamic terrorism continues. And so there will be a required continued effort from the United States to push back against ISIS in the region.

But the work that's been done in Iraq – we forget the days when there were prisoners in cages and beheadings on the beach. It seems distant, but it took enormous work from this administration to take the caliphate down, and now it's in its final throes. There's real work to develop democracy in Iraq, to work to develop an independent, sovereign nation there. We are hard at that, and I am confident that the nations of the region, the Gulf states will all work to make sure that Iraq has an opportunity – an opportunity to be independent from Iran, free and sovereign nation.

QUESTION: Are you encouraged by that new democracy?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Yes. But these things take work. They take work everywhere, and to put that – have that take root here in the Middle East is always a challenge, but we're determined to put our shoulder to the task.

QUESTION: From foreign policy to the Dr. Phil portion of the interview – I can roll in a couch if you like – your faith is very important to you. Can you take me back to West Point? I know there was a time in your life where there was a decision point for you about just following Christ, and our audience would be very interested to hear a little bit more on that.

SECRETARY POMPEO: So I grew up going to church on Sundays, but frankly it wasn't a priority in my life growing up. I went off to West Point, and as a young cadet, during my freshman year there were two young men who were juniors who were true men of faith. And they held these little Bible

study/cookie klatches on Sunday afternoons. And they invited all the cadets to see – it was purely voluntary. And I started showing up, and – truly remarkable. I started going to church every weekend on my own, because I wanted to be there to learn and to grow, and at some point during that first year I really did come to have an understanding of Jesus that was different than the one that I had before. It fundamentally changed my life.

QUESTION: And now, as Secretary of State – really before that, as a – well, you called yourself a backbencher from Kansas. It wasn't me earlier. But –

SECRETARY POMPEO: That's a fair description. (Laughter.)

QUESTION: Okay. Look where you are today. But your faith has informed your views, clearly. And not only that, but you're not shy to talk about it. And I'm wondering about how that – how that really manifests in your life.

SECRETARY POMPEO: So of course my mission as a Secretary of State, the thing I rose my – raised my right hand to do, I swore to support and defend the Constitution of the United States. And I've done that now a handful of times – first as a soldier, then as a member of Congress, then as the director of the CIA, now as Secretary of State. But in each of those missions, the task that I have is informed by my understanding of my faith, my belief in Jesus Christ as the savior. It doesn't drive answers and outcomes every day; we all as Christians are searching. But it does inform how I try to treat every human being with dignity and respect in ways that Christians ought to. I don't always live up to that standard, but it does inform the way I think about the world. I think that makes a real difference, and so I want people to know. It's why I talk about it from to time. I want folks to know the perspective that I am bringing to the challenges in the job that I face, and it also requires me to try to hold myself to the standards that Christians hold themselves out for.

QUESTION: And you also mentioned a Bible story last night when you had your statements with the prime minister. Today's being Purim, a celebration. Jews worldwide and here in Jerusalem are talking about the fact that Esther 2,500 years ago saved the Jewish people with God's help from Haman. And now 2,500 years later there's a new Haman here in the Middle East that wants to eradicate the Jewish people like just like Haman did: the state of Iran. Could it be that President Trump right now has been sort of raised for such a time as this, just like Queen Esther, to help save the Jewish people from the Iranian menace?

SECRETARY POMPEO: As a Christian I certainly believe that's possible. It was remarkable – so we were down in the tunnels where we could see 3,000 years ago, and 2,000 years ago – if I have the history just right – to see the remarkable history of the faith in this place and the work that our administration's done to make sure that this democracy in the Middle East, that this Jewish state remains. I am confident that the Lord is at work here.

QUESTION: Very nice. Secretary Pompeo, thanks so much for doing this.

SECRETARY POMPEO: Thank you.

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.