

Press Releases: Interview With Chuck Todd of NBC

Interview
Michael R. Pompeo

Secretary of State

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QUESTION: Mr. Secretary, welcome back to Meet the Press.

SECRETARY POMPEO: Chuck, it's great to be with you. It's great to host you here.

QUESTION: Yes, it's very nice to be here. Let me start with the issue of the FISA warrant and what the President was asking to get declassified. He seemed to say in an interview on Thursday night that a few allies had complained about the potential declassification of these FISA documents that have to do potentially with Carter Page. What more can you say? I assume it's the Five Eyes. Is it the UK, is it that group of nations that are trying to keep us from making this stuff public?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Chuck, I can't add much more to that, other than to say this: In my previous role as CIA director, and now as the Secretary of State, we are committed to making sure that we classify information properly. We try to get information out that shouldn't be classified. It's a historic problem in the United States Government. And second, we will always make sure that we protect our sources, our methods, information that comes in from partners that share with us. We understand how important that is, and President Trump and our team will always make sure that we do that right.

QUESTION: Has that order been fully rescinded or put on hold? It's – has he pulled back on it officially?

SECRETARY POMPEO: I'll leave to the White House that. It's not my neck of the woods these days. But make – I want the American people to know that we will always protect information we need to, and then we will do everything we can to be as transparent as America demands as well.

QUESTION: If you could give yourself advice when you were the head of the intelligence committee, what have you learned, both being at CIA and here at State, that you would tell yourself – boy, now I – that's something I didn't

understand, and I could have been a better House Intel Committee chair on accountability because of X? What advice would you give yourself going backwards?

SECRETARY POMPEO: One of the things you get to see when you actually run the organization is the enormous depth and breadth of the capacity of American – whether it's in our Intelligence Community or our diplomatic forces. I think you underappreciate that when you're a member of Congress. You get to see glimpses, but you don't get to see the whole of the body, the sum of the greatness.

QUESTION: Do you think if some of these members saw what you saw they would be a little less conspiratorial?

SECRETARY POMPEO: I do.

QUESTION: And is there a way to – do you think members of Congress should see more of this stuff so that maybe they wouldn't be so conspiratorial and really get the – calm the public down a little bit?

SECRETARY POMPEO: So I've tried to do that both in my previous role and this one. I try to be as open and on my front foot sharing information as I can possibly be, proactive in communicating, so that there is a better understanding. Look, sometimes being conspiratorial is appropriate too. Sometimes asking hard questions, it's their job, their oversight role.

QUESTION: Sure.

SECRETARY POMPEO: So I don't begrudge them that in any way.

QUESTION: But the tone, you think they could change that a little bit?

SECRETARY POMPEO: I would hope that the tone would be one where we're trying to all get at the same end, which is achieving America's foreign policy objectives.

QUESTION: This, of course, all has to do with Russia. And I say this in a – and I was preparing for this interview, and questions I had about North Korea, there was a Russian angle; questions I had about Iran, there's a Russian angle; questions I had about Syria, there's a Russian angle. The Russians don't seem to be helpful on any front here. Is that a fair assessment?

SECRETARY POMPEO: It's a pretty fair assessment, and it's most unfortunate because there are places where we have shared interest. I worked with them closely on counterterrorism issues. There's a handful of other places in the world where we do have overlapping interests, although certainly not values. They're a country that's very different from ours in that respect.

They have not proven helpful in the Ukraine, in Syria. You've shown it. We, this week, sanctioned – put sanctions on China as a result of the CAATSA law that passed, again, trying to push back against Russia's malign activity around the world. The President is trying to develop a relationship and

change that, but we've not been successful, at least to date.

QUESTION: It seems like it's a good cop/bad cop. You're being bad cop, Secretary – or maybe realistic when it comes to Russia, and the President has been trying to play good cop. Is that not working?

SECRETARY POMPEO: I don't think that's the situation at all. I think the predicate of your question is –

QUESTION: You don't accept it?

SECRETARY POMPEO: – just wrong. I think we're all trying to be cops that are protecting America, and I think we have actually achieved that, Chuck. I do believe America is fundamentally safer today than it was when President Trump took office for a host of reasons.

QUESTION: If Assad uses chemical weapons, are you going to hold Russia accountable for this?

SECRETARY POMPEO: The President has been very clear: We will go to the source of the bad behavior. We –

QUESTION: Who is the source of that bad behavior, though – Assad or the Russians?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Well, we'll have to analyze once the activity takes place. We pray that it doesn't. But we'll do our intelligence, our forensics; we'll do our hard work, and we will hold accountable those that are responsible for violating this fundamental principle, this idea that chemical weapons are fundamentally different than other types of weapons systems.

QUESTION: So Russia needs to know that it could be held accountable here if they're not careful?

SECRETARY POMPEO: We sanctioned – we've sanctioned Russia for chemical-biological weapons use, what they did in Skripal. The President is deadly serious to make sure that chemical weapons don't become the norm in the way nations act around the world.

QUESTION: Are we afraid to use – are we – would you rule – have we ruled out using a military response if we see something like that?

SECRETARY POMPEO: We're not going to rule out a single thing, Chuck.

QUESTION: Let me move to Iran here. You've said it isn't about regime change. So let me ask you this: If Rouhani wants a pull-aside with President Trump next week at the UN, is it gonna happen?

SECRETARY POMPEO: I think the President has been pretty clear about that. He's happy to talk with folks at any time.

QUESTION: So no precondition on that?

SECRETARY POMPEO: If there's a constructive dialogue to be had, let's get after it.

QUESTION: Is there one right now with the Iranians?

SECRETARY POMPEO: We'll have to see. It doesn't seem likely. Their behavior wouldn't indicate any intention to change the fundamental challenge that Iran presents to the world.

QUESTION: How do you make sure that the United States doesn't look like it's taking sides in Sunni versus Shia here? You guys are going to get tough on Iran this week. The President is going to chair this General Assembly meeting. But it does look like the United States is on every Sunni side of an issue. How do you sort of make sure that the United States isn't sending that message?

SECRETARY POMPEO: I don't think the members of ISIS would share your view. We've been incredibly hard on terror from wherever it comes, whether it's a Shia, whether it's the Sunnis, or whether it's anyone else engaged in terror around the world. Our objective is to protect American interests, and we will protect them no matter who it is perpetrating them, whether they come from a religion, no religion, or the Shias, or the Sunnis.

QUESTION: Are the Russians helpful at all on Iran?

SECRETARY POMPEO: They've not been to date.

QUESTION: Do you think they can be?

SECRETARY POMPEO: I always live in hope, Chuck. And indeed, it's my mission. As America's most senior diplomat, it is my task to convince the Russians too that firing rockets from Yemen into major Gulf states, arming Lebanese Hizballah, Kata'ib Hizballah, all of these activities, these aren't in Russia's best interest either. And just come – just coming at America to poke us in the eye is not a foreign policy objective. That's being a nuisance. And what I'd hope they do is they'd come to understand that we do have places where taking down terror matters to each of our two peoples.

QUESTION: All right. I know – I'm short on time so I want to make the final issue North Korea. You may end up meeting with your counterpart. I believe there's an invite there. Kim Jong-un seems to want to have another summit with President Trump. Any preconditions before that could happen again?

SECRETARY POMPEO: We have to make it work. That is, we have to –

QUESTION: What's "make it work," though?

SECRETARY POMPEO: We have to build it out, we have to set up the logistics, we've got to set the right conditions. But President Trump very much is prepared to meet with Chairman Kim at the right time, and we hope that'll happen in the not-too-distant future.

QUESTION: Have the North Koreans been honest about their nuclear program

compared to what we know of their nuclear program? Have they been honest yet with the world?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Here's what I'd say about North Korea. We came in. There was the risk of war. We've taken that threat down by taking the temperature down by beginning this set of discussions. They have stopped missile firings and nuclear testing. That's all to the good. We got back the remains of some of our soldiers. That's to the good.

We have our eyes wide open. There is a long ways to go to get Chairman Kim to live up to the commitment that he made to President Trump and indeed to the demands of the world and the UN Security Council resolutions to get him to fully denuclearize. But our team is fully engaged in this. There are lots of conversations taking place. There's lots of work being done. It isn't all visible to the public, but we are fully engaged in the process. We understand the objective, and economic sanctions will remain in place until we get there.

QUESTION: It sounds like you're saying that yes, he hasn't been fully honest yet.

SECRETARY POMPEO: Nope, you shouldn't take anything away from what I've said.

QUESTION: No?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Only that there remains a great deal of work to do, and we have the patience and determination and the President's mission statement to us at the State Department to make that happen.

QUESTION: Mr. Secretary, I'm going to leave it there.

SECRETARY POMPEO: Great.

QUESTION: Thanks for coming on.

SECRETARY POMPEO: Thank you, Chuck.

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