

Press Releases: Interview With David Brody of CBN

Interview
Michael R. Pompeo

Secretary of State

Treaty Room
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QUESTION: Okay. Mr. Secretary, thanks for doing this. We really appreciate it.

SECRETARY POMPEO: It is a blessing to be with you. Thank you.

QUESTION: Let me ask you – the ministerial conference coming up, the message you want to send on religious freedom. Explain why this event is so important.

SECRETARY POMPEO: So this is a big deal, the first time the State Department has ever hosted such a gathering. We'll have folks from over 80 countries, 40-plus foreign ministers, all kinds of religious groups and NGOs all coming together on a common theme, which is that the advancement of religious freedom matters to every individual in every country. The human dignity, human rights attached to religious freedom, I feel personally and I know President Trump does as well.

So we want this administration to make religious freedom a true priority for the United States State Department in every interaction we have with our foreign partners. Not every country will achieve the level of religious freedom that we have here in the United States. We think we can advance it all across the world by bringing together folks from all faiths and frankly those who have no faith, but their capacity to practice religion in the way that they choose is important for the world.

QUESTION: A victory. What is a victory coming out of this? In other words, what are some tangible results that you hope will eventually take seed, take root, if you will?

SECRETARY POMPEO: So we have a number of initiatives that we'll announce at the ministerial, some things that are concrete – not just talk, but real action. But second, we believe just the fact that we'll get all these people

together in a single room – we don't believe this has happened before under the auspices of the United States Government. We know it has not. And their presence, the capacity to get to know each other and work together and understand that we know many countries struggle to give religious freedom to their citizens – they'll see how other countries have overcome those challenges, how they have moved towards a more religiously tolerant society. We think those will demonstrate real, tangible, positive results in the weeks and months to follow this three-day gathering here at the State Department.

QUESTION: Explain a little bit about why this is personal for you. Because you – your faith I know is very, very important to you. You've talked about this in public before. So why – this seems – there's a public policy aspect, but it's also personal. Tell me a little bit about that.

SECRETARY POMPEO: Look, it's very consistent with what the Trump administration is trying to achieve with respect to religious freedom, but it also fits with my worldview. I am an Evangelical Christian. I know that not everyone shares that faith, but it's important. It's important not only to Christians, but people of all faiths have the capacity to worship in the way that they desire, that they do so without fear of retribution from their government or the risk that they'll be punished or not have the ability to raise themselves and their families in the faith the way that they want to. It is incredibly important that all faiths have the opportunity – that every individual have the opportunity to practice faith in the way they want. It's central to my understanding of my religion; it's central to understanding my role as the Secretary of State as well.

QUESTION: Pastor Brunson real quick, since it obviously ties in. What is your message to President Erdogan and Turkey on this specifically? This has been ongoing to the point of – many folks say – ridiculousness.

SECRETARY POMPEO: Time for Pastor Brunson to return home and to be free. We have worked diligently. The President personally has worked diligently on this issue. This is an example where a higher degree of religious freedom around the world would create less risk not only for the citizens of their own country but for Americans as they travel abroad. Pastor Brunson's case is very much a focus of the team that I lead here at the State Department, and we're optimistic that in the days and weeks ahead we'll get a good outcome for Pastor Brunson, his family, and frankly for many of those that are held in places around the world.

QUESTION: While I have you here, obviously, as Secretary of State, I've got to ask you about what's been going on with Vladimir Putin and Russia. So I just want to get that out. There has been talk at least about Putin wanting these U.S., American citizens interrogated somehow as part of the deal for election meddling and all of that, especially Mike McCaul, the former U.S. ambassador. And that's why I'm asking you specifically – the former U.S. ambassador for Russia. Is that a nonstarter that American citizens like Mike McCaul can be interrogated by the Russians? It's getting a lot of pushback.

SECRETARY POMPEO: Yeah, that's not going to happen. There's been a lot of heat and relatively little light in the past few days about the President's

visit to Helsinki. He went there with the objective to create an opportunity for leaders of these two powers that own enormous nuclear capacity to have a channel to communicate. There were places they found overlap. We're going to work on counterterrorism together. We're hopeful that on some of these grand arms control issues that are very important to the world that there may well be a path forward. But make no mistake; President Trump understands that Russia doesn't share our interests in every place, and so he was very clear with Vladimir Putin about that.

With respect to the particular question, the administration is not going to send or force Americans to travel to Russia to be interrogated by Vladimir Putin and his team.

QUESTION: Fair enough. One last question as it relates to Russia. A little bit about what happens now exactly in terms of a lot of folks believe that, in essence, Russia is still spying on the United States. You're a former CIA guy and now Secretary of State. What's the answer to that?

SECRETARY POMPEO: There is a long history, decades of history, of Russia's efforts to undermine Western democracy – the Soviet Union for decades, now Russia for the last few. I don't expect that will stop. It is this administration's mission to raise the costs for Russian activity of that kind to attempt to deter them. We're eyes wide open about Russia's efforts to undermine Western democracy. We're going to do our level best to stop them. And when we don't stop them, we will call them out for it and make sure they understand that that type of behavior is unacceptable. This administration has been incredibly tough on Russia. We're proud of that, and I'm confident we'll have to continue to do so as there is still Russian behavior that is inconsistent with a good relationship between our two countries.

QUESTION: Do you think the media and liberals are a little bit out of control on the treason stuff? I mean, they've been just hammering this President on open treason. What has been your view of that?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Yeah, it's silly. I actually looked back at some of the senators' statements when Obama was – the president was Barack Obama. They were talking about the need for important and good relationship between somehow – somehow they have either changed their mind, or they've become pure political hacks. I suspect it's the latter and not the former.

QUESTION: And while I have you, last question on North Korea human rights. Do you trust Kim Jong-un? You've met him, obviously. What's your sense of that? And how much of human rights and that discussion, religious freedom, ever come up in some of these discussions at all?

SECRETARY POMPEO: So I'm avoiding talking about the conversations I've had with the North Koreans as we're in active negotiations with them, but I want your viewers to know that the United States rarely has an encounter with a country where we don't raise human rights concerns where they exist. We know the history there in North Korea. We know the history of many countries with which we deal.

We have a broad range of issues with these nations, so there are times that we can't make that the only issue upon which we focus. But your viewers should understand that religious freedom and human rights are something that the State Department puts at the center of our discussions with those countries that aren't living up to what the appropriate standard for those types of behaviors ought to be.

QUESTION: Good luck with the ministerial.

SECRETARY POMPEO: Thank you very much.

QUESTION: A very important event. Thank you.

SECRETARY POMPEO: Thank you, sir.

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