

Press Releases: Interview With Fox & Friends

Interview
Michael R. Pompeo

Secretary of State

New York City
December 12, 2018

QUESTION: Let's bring in Mike Pompeo, the U.S. Secretary of State. Thank you so much for being here with us.

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

QUESTION: We have so many topics to get through with you. First of all, what's your reaction to this?

SECRETARY POMPEO: So it's obviously tragic. The loss of life is always awful. But these risks of terror, we all need to be mindful, they're everywhere. Europe has got an enormous challenge. The United States tries our best to help them. We try to keep Americans safe when they're traveling over this holiday season. This was a Christmas market. This appears to have been attacked because it was a Christmas market, although the facts are still developing. These are real risks all around the world and we can – we must always be mindful that America has a big role in preventing terror around the world.

QUESTION: No Americans killed?

SECRETARY POMPEO: It appears there were no Americans killed or injured, but we still don't have all the facts just yet.

QUESTION: Sure. Apparently he was on a terror watch list. The police were going to arrest him before he started shooting. They got to his house and he wasn't there, so they were unable to arrest him. He was on a terror watch list, though, and some – we had an expert on this morning about an hour ago who said why have a terror watch list if we can't keep an eye on people.

SECRETARY POMPEO: Yeah, Steve. This is an enormous challenge. We have this problem here in the United States as well. Lots of folks that we're watching we think are a risk we try to monitor, but the numbers are so big. It's why, frankly, border security matters too. These are related issues in the sense

of we need to know who's coming in and out of our country so there are fewer people that the FBI and sheriff's offices in Kansas and places like that have to monitor and watch. Every time we add to people here who have the risk of becoming radicalized, we increase the risk to American citizens.

QUESTION: Yeah, I know you're in contact – as we switch over to immigration – with the new president of Mexico and I know you're going to be heading there shortly. What is their role, do you think, on their southern border to protect our southern border? Do you see that they – do they see an urgency now that perhaps they haven't sensed before?

SECRETARY POMPEO: The incoming administration's been great. They've now been in power for less than two weeks. But our conversations about how it is we control traffic flow into Mexico along their southern border from Guatemala, from Honduras –

QUESTION: What we saw was a joke. They let rocks dissuade them from stopping caravans.

SECRETARY POMPEO: We have to control that border that is ours and they have to control that border that is theirs. And we're happy to support them, we're happy to try and do the things we can do to help them, but this is a real national security issue for the United States of America, so it shouldn't surprise you that the State Department is involved in trying to make sure that we do what the President has said, which is to have control over our southern border.

QUESTION: Sure. Well, the President yesterday – I'm sure you saw the President's contentious meeting in the Oval Office with Nancy Pelosi and Chuck Schumer. They said we don't need the wall. The President said I'm willing to shut down the government over this wall thing. What do you say? You used to be in Congress.

SECRETARY POMPEO: Yeah. The Democrats have been all over on this issue when I was a member of Congress. Now I try to step away from the domestic U.S. politics, but this much is sure: We have to have the capacity to control entry into our country everywhere – through our airports and ports, but most importantly today at the southern border, and a wall is a vital component of that, and we ought to build it out.

QUESTION: Nancy Pelosi said yesterday we don't need it.

SECRETARY POMPEO: Yeah.

QUESTION: Experts say we don't need.

SECRETARY POMPEO: We should build it out. We should do all the things we need to do to control the flow of people into our country in a way that is lawful only.

QUESTION: Mr. Secretary, there's no doubt about it if – see, most of the people coming here illegally are not Mexicans, OTMs. So if Mexico sees the same problem, is there a chance they'll pay for this wall? Have you had

initial conversations about this?

SECRETARY POMPEO: So we're working in the State Department on lots of issues not directly related to the wall. There are lots of things the Mexican Government can do to discourage this transit from these three Northern Triangle countries. And I think back to my time in Kansas. There's a big highway that runs out of Mexico. We used to have a lot of illegal traffic come up that very highway. There are many components to this. A border wall and a security system is certainly one of them. But frankly, the most important thing we can do is turn off the flow from those three countries and reduce the risk to our Customs and Border Patrol agents, our ICE agents, the men and women who are tasked with apprehending these folks who have transited into our country illegally.

QUESTION: Let's talk about the murder of Jamal Khashoggi. The President doubled down on his support of the Saudi crown prince, said he's a good ally. You have some senators that are calling for more action. They want condemnation; they want him to be penalized. You're going to be briefing the House today. What do you plan on saying?

SECRETARY POMPEO: So we're going to say to the House what we've said to the American people. President Trump's made very clear: The murder of Jamal Khashoggi was a tragic incident; it was heinous. It's not something that America approves of. We've already held a number of individuals accountable by putting sanctions on them, those that we have evidence were directly involved. We'll continue to develop the facts, but America has an important ally in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. They work with us on issues that provide security for America and for Israel. It is an important relationship with the kingdom and we intend to continue to protect the American people in the way that voters back two years ago demanded.

QUESTION: Right. But Mr. Secretary, they're the ones who are putting it in peril, not us. They're the ones who have evidently pulled this off. And when you have people like Lindsey Graham, hardly an enemy of the White House, and Bob Corker and others said this is a "smoking saw," not a "smoking gun," and you even have audio tapes, we know the prince knows, right? You know, you looked him in the eye. You know that he knows.

SECRETARY POMPEO: I've spoken to the king, King Salman. I've spoken to the crown prince a number of times since the murder of Jamal Khashoggi, and it is absolutely America's intent to hold everyone accountable who was responsible for this.

QUESTION: So that's yes, you – when you looked him in the eye and he denied it, did you believe him?

SECRETARY POMPEO: The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia decides who's running the country. I think this is what the President said yesterday. We are working closely with the kingdom to make sure that America is protected. That's our interest there.

QUESTION: What's your response? The CIA says that they're highly confident

that the Saudi crown prince did order the murder of Khashoggi.

SECRETARY POMPEO: Yeah, some of the reporting that you've seen on that has been inaccurate.

QUESTION: Is that part – is that inaccurate?

QUESTION: That's false?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Look, we all know they're still working on this. This is still a developing set of facts with respect to the murder of Jamal Khashoggi. The intelligence community is working diligently on that. The direct evidence – this is what I've said before – the direct evidence isn't yet available. It may show up tomorrow; it may have shown up overnight and I haven't seen it. But President Trump is – President Trump –

QUESTION: Someone has to pay the price, though. It's so brutal. Apparently, those audio tapes are awful.

SECRETARY POMPEO: Well, we – the Saudis have already paid the price. There are the folks who actually committed the murder we've held accountable. We will continue to do that. No one underestimates how horrible this murder was, but remember, Iran is running rampant throughout the Middle East. The death of any one individual is awful. The death of hundreds of thousands of people in Europe or the Middle East or the United States matters an awful lot, and President Trump is committed to protecting America.

QUESTION: Well it's a big story. That's why *Time Magazine* made murdered journalists the cover story for Man of the Year, People of the Year.

Let's talk a little bit about China. We know that the President has tried to equalize the whole tariff situation between us and them, and the stock market has gone up and down and up and down. I know that there are other people negotiating the trade deals and the tariff stuff as well, but what's your involvement in that? Because right now, it looks to some from the outside like maybe we're not on good terms with China.

SECRETARY POMPEO: So our relationship with China is a challenging one to be sure. We consider them a strategic competitor. They are taking actions in the South China Sea. They're conducting espionage and influence operations here in the United States.

QUESTION: The latest one was the Marriott.

SECRETARY POMPEO: That's right.

QUESTION: 500 million guests there have been – had their security breached.

SECRETARY POMPEO: They have committed cyber attacks across the world. Our effort, from Department of Homeland Security and the FBI and the State Department, is to push back against these threats to America from China. Trade is a component of that to be sure. The President is very focused on making sure Americans get a chance to sell their products into China. It's a

big market, and the President is determined to get a level playing field for American businesses.

QUESTION: Are we closer? Are we closer to a deal?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Yeah, I think we're closer. I truly think we're closer, and I'm very hopeful in the next handful of weeks there'll be some good announcements on that front.

QUESTION: This Huawei executive, the President says, "I might have to get directly involved if it hurts our trade negotiations." That that would be him going into the law enforcement end where there's a trade end. Do you worry about the President blending the two?

SECRETARY POMPEO: We always have to balance American interests. Any time there's a law enforcement engagement, we need to make sure we take foreign policy consideration – considerations into effect. It's totally appropriate to do so. The President's mission is very clear. It's "America First," right? Making sure that we protect the American people from threats, whether they emanate from Russia or from China or from any of the other places we've had the chance to talk about this morning.

QUESTION: Let's talk about your speech in Brussels – bold, unconventional. Was your message heard?

SECRETARY POMPEO: I think so. We've gotten lots of feedback from it to be sure.

QUESTION: Such as?

SECRETARY POMPEO: I'm not sure unconventional is accurate, but we told hard truths about the things that America intends to do. There's this notion somehow that we've withdrawn from American leadership, and nothing could be further from the truth. President Trump has boldly reasserted American leadership. But where organizations that no longer function in the way they should have, right – if there's inadequate burden-sharing at NATO, if the UN is acting in a way that is against Israel, we're going to call it out in this administration.

QUESTION: But they don't – the world doesn't like the whole "America First" message. They like the world first.

SECRETARY POMPEO: Yeah. We're committed to leading in America. We want them to assert their own sovereignty as well. We want those leaders of their countries to protect their people too, and we think together that will create peace and prosperity for the world.

QUESTION: You're the chief diplomat, but it's obviously the thuggish behavior of the Russians with the Ukrainians, taking three ships and 24 sailors. Nothing's budged. What could we actually do in coordination with Defense to stop the aggression from Georgia to the Ukraine? It's not ceasing and bombers now in Venezuela. How urgent is this and how can an economy that's shrinking like this act as boldly as that?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Sometimes the last act doesn't appear to be the last act, and deterrence is just on the horizon. We have pushed back against Russia in serious ways. We've provided defensive weapon systems for the Ukrainians to defend their own country. We have sanctioned more Russians than any administration in recent history. This administration has been very serious. We've obviously seen these incidents in the Kerch Strait, and we're working with our European partners, for whom this is in their backyard and presents a real short-term risk, to make sure they understand the importance of protecting that waterway and pushing back against the Russians in a way that actually leads to deterrence from this kind of aggression from Vladimir Putin.

QUESTION: Well, Mr. Secretary, we know you've been doing a lot of traveling all over the world since you got the job.

SECRETARY POMPEO: Yes, sir.

QUESTION: Thanks for dropping by the couch.

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

QUESTION: Good to see you, Mr. Secretary.

QUESTION: Thank you so much. Great to see you. Wish you all the best today.

SECRETARY POMPEO: Brian, wonderful to see you too, sir. Wonderful to see you. Thank you.

QUESTION: Congratulations on everything. Thank you.

QUESTION: And Merry Christmas.

SECRETARY POMPEO: Thank you. Merry Christmas, Steve.

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.