

Press Releases: Interview With Hugh Hewitt of the Hugh Hewitt Show

Interview
Michael R. Pompeo

Secretary of State

Via Telephone
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QUESTION: Secretary Pompeo, in fact, joins me. Good morning, Mr. Secretary. Good to have you back.

SECRETARY POMPEO: Hugh, it's good to be with you. It's been too long.

QUESTION: Well, I want to talk about religious liberty with you, but a first question. You're just back from Korea, Vietnam, the United Arab Emirates, Brussels, and of course Russia. Last time we talked you stressed that we know everything about everyone who attacks us. And I just want to make sure, for deterrence purposes, is that the case? Are we aware with certainty of the origin of cyber attacks, because it's so essential to deterrence that we do know that?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Hugh, it's not always the case every day that we do. But with great frequency, we can do attribution in a way that gives U.S. policymakers an enormous advantage in understanding the threat.

QUESTION: David Sanger has a new book out stressing why we need to be able to pinpoint people and speak about it, because otherwise the whole world will attack us with impunity. Did you take the message to friend and foe that we are watching and we have the tools?

SECRETARY POMPEO: They do know, Hugh. But David's comments are a little bit naive to be honest with you. It's the case that we can't always publicly do what David described. It would be foolish for America to consistently announce everything we know. It would betray how we came to know it; it would share with them information that we don't want them to have about our capabilities and our skillsets. And so, make no mistake about it, we are very clear with our adversaries, when it's in our best interest, to share with them what we're doing.

QUESTION: Now after a major week of events – and I mean, you went through a week that culminated in the Helsinki controversy – then Andrew Brunson does

not get released. How hard is it to refocus a department that is convulsed by stories on the ministerial next week and on the individuals like Pastor Brunson? Can you get everyone to get back on the page of focusing on religious liberty next week?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Hugh, thanks for the question. We've got a religious freedom ministerial that is going to have 80-plus delegations. It's historic. It's the first time the State Department has taken on this mission. We believe religious freedom is central to the world and to, frankly, America's place in the world. We make it a real priority. Pastor Brunson in particular has been a priority of mine since even before I had this current role. The entire administration is focused on getting his return.

But one of the reasons we're conducting the ministerial, Hugh, is because not every country shares our same understanding of religious freedom, and our effort in holding this ministerial here, where we have 40-plus foreign minister level visitors coming to attend, is to move each country in the direction where increased religious freedom around the world can thrive.

QUESTION: Now, Secretary Pompeo, for the benefit of the Steelers fans and others, a ministerial is a term they may not be familiar with. You just alluded to what it means. It means people like the Secretary of State of the United States and your counterpart in the United Kingdom and across the world coming to Washington. So what's on that agenda?

SECRETARY POMPEO: It's a broad agenda. We're going to talk about how religious freedom fits into a democratic society, how it makes sense for each country, how it can improve economies in the world by having this religious freedom, by allowing all persons of every faith – or those who have no faith – to have the freedom to worship or choose not to in the way that they prefer. We believe that improving respect for religious freedom requires more than just talk, and so we're bringing people together. We'll announce several new initiatives over the course of the two days of the summit. And we're very much looking forward to it. We're hosting a huge gathering here at the State Department that I think will advance the cause of religious freedom around the world in a way that America has not done for too long.

QUESTION: Every year, we put out a list of Countries of Particular Concern, CPCs. At the top of that list every year is Iran, which may be the most anti-Semitic and the most repressive of other religion countries in the world. I don't imagine Iran is sending anyone to this conference. But what can we do to encourage an extremist, fanatical regime like Iran to leave their indigenous other religions alone?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Iran is a huge challenge. They would be a perfect exemplar for the absence of religious freedom inside of a country. There are others too. With respect to Iran, a key component of this is exactly what we're doing at this gathering. We're talking about it; we're raising it. We're raising the awareness. You referenced the report that the State Department puts out. It's just a piece of paper; it's just words, for sure. But calling it out and trying to articulate the rationale for why it matters and those that are behaving badly, whether it's by anti-Semitism or persecuting

Christians, these are incredibly important concerns to the United States and to President Trump. And our mission in holding this gathering is to get the world to unite behind this fundamental concept of religious freedom for every individual.

QUESTION: Now Secretary Pompeo, last week the forces of Daniel Ortega opened fire on a Catholic church. They actually kept up a gun battle aimed at a Catholic church all night long. What do we do in response to that?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Nicaragua has got enormous challenges today. The Ortega regime, including his wife, are behaving – it's not just about the attack on the church. Their activities – the violence level has been raised. We are working to bring all of the elements of U.S. power to bear there. The State Department is at the front of trying to convince Ortega that it's time for a democratic process to begin and a solution to be achieved there and that violence is not a mechanism that's going to result in success for either he, his family, or the elites around him.

QUESTION: Well, let me close, Mr. Secretary, by going back to the Helsinki summit. Just a factual question: Were you consulted by the Department of Justice before the indictments were filed?

SECRETARY POMPEO: I can't talk about that, Hugh.

QUESTION: And while – and theoretically, would it be useful for the Department of State to be consulted before such matters as important as that are conducted, on a theoretical basis?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Yes, Hugh. It is common practice that when the Department of Justice is going to take action that has diplomatic implications or foreign policy implications that we would be notified of those actions.

QUESTION: And then back to Pastor Brunson. Do we have any reason to hope, in the week ahead, that he gets out, Secretary Pompeo?

SECRETARY POMPEO: I – as a man of faith, Hugh, I am always of the belief that good things will happen. And you should know that the United States Government is working diligently to ensure the release of Pastor Brunson. And then there are others being held in Turkey too that we're working hard on.

QUESTION: Secretary Pompeo, thank you for joining me. And good luck with the ministerial next week. It's vitally important that people pay attention to it. And I appreciate your taking the time this morning.

SECRETARY POMPEO: Thank you, Hugh. It's wonderful to be back with you. So long.

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