

Press Releases: Interview With Jake Tapper of CNN

Interview
Michael R. Pompeo

Secretary of State

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QUESTION: Joining me now from Santiago, Chile to discuss this and much, much more is the Secretary of State Mike Pompeo. Mr. Secretary, thanks so much for being here. I know that you want to talk about the International Criminal Court, and I'll get to that in one second.

SECRETARY POMPEO: Jake, it's great to be – it's great to be with you, Jake.

QUESTION: Thank you so much, sir. I know you weren't present for the conversation between the President and Commissioner McAleenan, but would you note – or what do you say to senior administration officials when they say to you: Boy, President Trump is so frustrated by these immigration laws, he doesn't seem to understand that we have to adhere to them even if he doesn't like them?

SECRETARY POMPEO: I've been in lots of conversations on the enormous crisis at our border, and I've watched this President try to use every tool in our toolkit. We've done everything that we can. We've stayed within the law. We need Congress to make changes to that so that we can stop this humanitarian and security crisis. And every meeting I've been in has been very focused on that.

QUESTION: The President today admitted that he's considering trying to move undocumented migrants to sanctuary cities, and he seemed to acknowledge this is for political reasons, to retaliate against Democrats. Why do you think that's the right policy, if you do, in fact?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Jake, I'm here in Santiago, Chile. I came on to talk with you today about an enormously important decision that helped keep Americans safe. Outside the threat that our soldiers, sailors, airmen, and Marines, who have protected America for years, are now, because of the policies of the Trump administration undertaken, no longer are threatened by a rogue court, the International Criminal Court. That's my focus for this morning, and it's what I hope we get a chance to talk about today.

QUESTION: All right. Let me turn to that question and then I'll come back to a couple others that I have. The International Criminal Court today said that they will not investigate the U.S. for allegations of alleged war crimes in Afghanistan. Amnesty International said this was a quote, "craven capitulation to Washington's bullying and threats, and an abandonment of the victims." Why do you disagree with Amnesty International? If somebody committed a war crime, why should they not be held responsible? I should note that this isn't just about Americans, it's also about Afghans as well.

SECRETARY POMPEO: That's exactly right, Jake, it's about a much broader people. Let's be very clear, though, with respect to America in particular, we didn't sign the treaty for the ICC. It has no jurisdiction under – over our people. It's been trying to exert it.

You know this, Jake, as well as I do: When Americans misbehave, whether it's our military, intelligence officers, we have a robust democratic process that holds them accountable. You've seen us do that for those that misbehaved. There is in no way any need for the ICC to intervene.

Frankly, this was – this would have been a very political effort to try and take on the people who were acting on behalf of the United States in ways that were completely consistent with our laws and try and hold them accountable in ways that were completely inappropriate. I am very pleased that the ICC made this decision today. It's the right one.

Know that if Americans are found to have done things that are unlawful or against the laws of war, the U.S. system will always hold them accountable, but the ICC is not the right place to do it. We didn't sign up for that, and they had no authority over these people. I'm glad that they recognized that.

QUESTION: So you're in Chile right now. Let me ask you a question if I can about our immigration policy. President Trump has cut aid to Honduras, El Salvador, and Guatemala – the so-called Norther Triangle countries in Central America. He says they're not doing enough on immigration. Your own agency, the State Department, your own experts and data suggest that the aid is actually having a tremendous effect, and in El Salvador the aid went in and homicides went down and the number of people fleeing El Salvador went down. Isn't it self-defeating for the United States to cut those aid dollars? Doesn't it just end up sending more migrants, more caravans to the United States?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Jake, that's the liberal theory for sure. Let's just go back to basic reality; it's what we try and do in the Trump administration. Hundreds of millions of dollars spent in Honduras, in Guatemala, in El Salvador, and you see the results. You see the results yesterday, you saw them last week, you see people fleeing those nations. Throwing more money at this problem, which is what I think your question is suggesting, there's no reason to believe that we'd get any outcome that is different from the one that we're suffering from today.

So what the Trump administration is trying to do is saying hey, we're prepared to help. We're prepared to engage. We're prepared to support. But

you, you have to take serious efforts, whether it's in Guatemala, El Salvador, and Nicaragua, and Mexico for that matter too – we need those nations to ensure that their people aren't making this dangerous transit across Mexico and coming into our country illegally. That's what we're asking these countries to do. When they begin to do that, America's support will again return.

QUESTION: Well, you can call it liberal if you want. The statistics come from your State Department, and among the individuals who support the idea of foreign aid to those countries are the last Department of Homeland Security secretary, Kirstjen Nielsen, and the current acting secretary, Kevin McAleenan. They think that that money helps keep migrants in those countries. I'm not sure that you think they're liberal.

SECRETARY POMPEO: I think that President Trump's decision makes perfect sense. We're going to get this right, Jake. We're going to stop spending hundreds of millions of dollars of U.S. taxpayer monies and ending up with the same result we've ended up for for far too long. I think the data that you described proves this point. It describes that what we were doing simply didn't work.

QUESTION: Well, the data as I saw –

SECRETARY POMPEO: Jake, you know the old saw, right?

QUESTION: Yeah.

SECRETARY POMPEO: If what you're doing doesn't work, you ought to think about another path forward. You'd agree with that, wouldn't you, Jake?

QUESTION: I would. But from what I got from Customs and border patrol folks – Border Protection folks using State Department data was money went to El Salvador, homicides went down by 50 percent, and fewer migrants were coming from El Salvador. Now, I take your point that not all the governments of the Northern Triangle countries are doing everything you want them to do, but it seems to me just based on your agency's data that you giving money to El Salvador was helping to reduce violence in that country and helping to reduce migrants coming from El Salvador to the United States.

SECRETARY POMPEO: Jake, the American taxpayers have been enormously generous to each of those three countries for an awfully long time. We're prepared to continue to do that, but we've got to see things change. We've got to see reality, real outcomes on the ground. Jake, when we see that I promise you Americans will continue to be generous, we'll continue to make sense with how we spend our dollars, and we will get good outcomes. It's not enough to spend money and have wishful thinking. President Trump understands that we need to see actual change, actual good outcomes. When we see those, when we see those nations engage in activities that reduce the outflow of migration from their nations, the American people will continue to be incredibly generous. They always have been.

QUESTION: Do you have any concerns – let's switch to the Middle East. I'm

sorry, let me identify the – your bailiwick is the world here. Let's go a little bit to the east. Do you have any concerns about the comments Israeli prime minister who – Benjamin Netanyahu, who was just reelected – made right before he was reelected vowing to annex the West Bank? Do you think that might hurt the pursuit of peace, the two-state solution proposal that Jared Kushner and others, including you, have been working so hard on?

SECRETARY POMPEO: I don't. I think that the vision that we'll lay out is going to represent a significant change from the model that's been used. Again, I talked about it in Central America, we've had a lot of ideas for 40 years; they did not deliver peace between the Israelis and the Palestinians. Our mission set is to put forward a vision. Ultimately, the Israelis and the Palestinian people will have to make this – resolve this for themselves.

But our idea is to put forward a vision that has ideas that are new, that are different, that are unique, that tries to reframe and reshape what's been an intractable problem that multiple administrations have grappled with, multiple administrations in Israel as well. We hope that we can get to a better place. Everyone wants this conflict resolved. We want a better life for the Israelis without this conflict, and we certainly want a better life for the people of – the Palestinian people, both in the West Bank and in Gaza.

QUESTION: All right. I'm being told that I have a deadline and I have to get off, because you have other things to do. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, we always enjoy you coming on and taking our questions. Thanks so much for your time, and safe travels.

SECRETARY POMPEO: Thank you, Jake. Thank you, sir.

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