

Press Releases: Interview With Judy Woodruff of PBS NewsHour

Interview
Michael R. Pompeo

Secretary of State

Sheraton Hotel
Warsaw, Poland
February 13, 2019

QUESTION: Secretary Mike Pompeo, thank you very much for joining us. You are in Poland for a meeting to discuss the future of the Middle East. What do you want to come out of this meeting?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Well, Judy, thanks for having me on the show. I appreciate the opportunity to speak with your audience. We've gathered 70 nations to talk about how we achieve Middle East stability and prosperity and peace. As you know, this region is fraught with risk, and we will spend tomorrow, we spent a good part of tonight talking about the various risks and how this coalition, how different countries from every continent save for Antarctica can come together and deliver on Middle East peace. We hope to walk away from here with a number of ideas and plans. We hope to have follow-up meetings where we can truly begin to deliver on something that the Middle East certainly needs and the world will benefit from as well.

QUESTION: So we are told that a number of key Middle Eastern and European officials decided not to attend. There are some countries represented at a lower level. How does that affect your ability to move this forward?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Judy, this event's been absolutely historic. It's the first time we've put it together. And even tonight it's the first time in a quarter of a century that you had the prime minister of Israel in the same room talking about threats in the Middle East with senior Arab leaders from all across the Middle East. It was truly remarkable. It was historic. Seventy-plus countries gathered together, all sharing ideas. We come from different backgrounds. We come from different places. We see these risks differently. But tonight, I think we began a conversation which will lead to really good outcomes all across the Middle East.

QUESTION: You mentioned the prime minister of Israel, Mr. Netanyahu. He just a short time ago was quoted as saying, tweeting that the countries were there

to discuss their “common interest of war with Iran.” They later changed the wording to say “common interest of combating Iran,” but is that the focus?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Well, it may not surprise you, Judy, I was out with American soldiers on freedom’s frontier today. I didn’t have a chance to spend a lot of time on Twitter, so I haven’t seen those remarks.

No, this gathering is certainly about Middle East peace and stability. You can’t talk about that without talking about the threat from the Islamic Republic of Iran, whether it’s Hizballah, Hamas, the Houthis – I call them the three H’s – whether it’s their work against the Iraqi government, trying to harm the independence and sovereignty of Iraq, whether it’s what they’re doing in Syria today.

There are shared interests there between the Saudis, between the Emiratis, between the Bahrainis, the Jordanians, the Israelis all understand that their nations are at risk from Iran, and the Europeans heard tonight as well their nations are at risk as well. Iran is conducting an assassination campaign throughout Europe. This is a global phenomenon. The threat from Middle East instability is real, and you can’t possibly talk about it without talking about the enormous influence that Iran has had in the Middle East, none of which has been for good.

QUESTION: Well, Mr. Secretary, we know you’ve appealed directly to the people of Iran, but a question that’s been raised is how can you expect them to support this when many of them wanted that nuclear agreement to go forward, many of them just don’t want to be seen as supporting the U.S. right now. How – is that a tack that you think you can count on?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Judy, we don’t expect the Iranian people to support the U.S. We expect them to take care of their own country. We hear from Iranians all the time at the United States State Department. They are wholly dissatisfied with the conditions that are inside of their country. They watch the kleptocracy that is the clerical regime there. They watch it squander money around the world. They watch it get their brothers and sisters killed in wars all across the region. And for what? For the IRGC, for Qasem Soleimani, not for the benefit of the Iranian people.

So what we want the Iranian people to do is not support Europe or support the United States or anyone else. We want the Iranian people to have the opportunity to live in a prosperous, peaceful society and one that is controlled by their desires, their wishes. And if we can get that, I am very confident that these behaviors that we see in Iran will change dramatically.

QUESTION: And one other question, Mr. Secretary, about Iran, and that is it’s been pointed out that the U.S. singles out human rights abuses in Iran but does not do so with regard to countries like Egypt, like Syria, like Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. How do you reconcile that?

SECRETARY POMPEO: I mean, Judy, your statement’s just false. You reconcile it by going and looking at our record, and we’ve made very clear that the failure to observe the most basic fundamental human rights, treating human

beings with the dignity and respect to which they are entitled by nature of their humanity, the United States calls that out wherever we find shortcomings, whether that's the Muslim Uighurs that are being held in detention camps in China or what's happening in Iran or any other country where we find it, North Korea, the list goes on. The United States is very consistent, and we ask every nation to treat their people with the basic human rights to which each of us is entitled.

QUESTION: Well, one of the countries that conversation has led to has to do with the war in Yemen, and you may know that just a short time ago the U.S. House of Representatives, where you previously served, passed a bill basically saying that the U.S. can no longer put money toward the military effort, the U.S. – the Saudi-led coalition in Yemen. Is this a – how much of a rebuke, of a setback, is this to the President?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Look, members of Congress – I was one – they get to vote the way they want to vote and pass resolutions that they want to pass. That's certainly their right. You should know that we listen to them. I meet with senators and members of the House of Representatives all the time and talk to them about a range of issues, and we certainly hear their voice with respect to Yemen.

But you know just tonight, Judy, I was with foreign ministers from the Emirates, the Saudis, and Britain, the UK. We met with Martin Griffiths from the UN, who is working to solve this problem in Yemen. We have two problems – three problems really. The first problem is al-Qaida. It's still there. The United States is doing its best to take down that terror threat. The second problem is Iran continuing to fund the Houthis. If you want to know who's caused the humanitarian crisis in Yemen, you need look no further than the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Judy, for example, how many dollars has Iran provided for humanitarian assistance in Yemen? I can tell you. Do you know?

QUESTION: I don't know.

SECRETARY POMPEO: It's zero. How much money – how much money have the Emiratis and Saudis provided? The Americans, the Brits, the Saudis, and the Emiratis are doing everything we can to take down the threat from the humanitarian crisis in Yemen while Iran fuels it. It provides missiles to the Houthis that they launch into airports in Saudi Arabia and the Emirates.

These are the challenges in Yemen, these are the challenges that this administration is determined to push back against, and we're going to keep at it.

QUESTION: And we assume this legislation will go on to the Senate, which passed similar language not very long ago. So we'll watch to see what happens.

Just finally, Mr. Secretary, I want to take you to North Korea, which, of course, is another major focus of yours with this upcoming meeting between

President Trump and the North Korean leader Kim Jong-un. There are reports now that the International Atomic Energy Agency may be allowed back into North Korea. Can you confirm that?

SECRETARY POMPEO: No, ma'am, I can't – I can't confirm that for you this evening. What I can tell your viewers is that President Trump is headed there on the 27th and 28th to Hanoi to have a second conversation with Chairman Kim Jong-un, and we really hope that we can make progress, a significant step towards denuclearizing the Korean Peninsula. That'll reduce risk. It'll reduce all the tension that's been along that border for far too long. And then we hope we can create a brighter future, a much brighter future for the North Korean people as well. That's the mission that the President's given me, and it's one that we hope we make a significant advance on at the end of this month.

QUESTION: Well, we will certainly be following that story and we'll be following your travels in Europe today. We wish you – we wish you safe travels, Secretary Mike Pompeo. Thank you very much.

SECRETARY POMPEO: Thank you, ma'am. Have a good evening, Judy. So long.

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