

Press Releases: Interview With Laura Ingraham of The Laura Ingraham Show Podcast

Interview
Michael R. Pompeo

Secretary of State

Via Teleconference
January 24, 2019

QUESTION: Joining us now is Secretary of State Mike Pompeo. I'm delighted he's with us. We're going to get the most up-to-date information from him on where this all stands, and he joins us now. Mr. Secretary, thanks for joining us.

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

QUESTION: So the concern now that Politico is writing about is that we're leaving U.S. diplomats in Venezuela, and concern for their safety. We remember of course what happened in Benghazi. What can we do to reassure the American people that our diplomats are going to be safe during this time of tumult?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Laura, you should know, and your listeners should all know, that we are continuously, 24/7, evaluating security conditions. There's no higher priority for the State Department than to keep all the people in our missions safe and secure. And we've made clear to the Maduro regime that it is our expectation that they will be safe and secure. And we will continue to evaluate.

We do this in our missions all across the world every day. We certainly have a real focus here and some of the other places that have greater security threats. But know that we are very focused on this, and we'll make the right decision. What we want to make sure that the – that former President Maduro knows is that he doesn't have the right to make the decision about whether or not we stay there. We now recognize the new, the interim President Guaido, and it is he who has asked us to be there under our diplomatic authority. And it's under that authority that we have the right to continue our diplomatic mission there in Caracas, in Venezuela. And we will continue to assert that right.

We'll make the right decision about our team and how many and for how long they can stay, but know that we're focused on their security, but that they also have an important mission. The reason we want to be there is because we need a strong, democratic Venezuela where the humanitarian crisis, the disastrous conditions under which Maduro has let his people live for far too long, needs to be changed. And that's the State Department's mission. It's our focus there.

QUESTION: The Russians, not happy about any of this, and they're warning against any military intervention by the United States. Many people concerned about this becoming a flashpoint between the U.S. and Russia, with some larger conflagration happening as a result. And just back to the security issue, if something should be done to threaten our diplomats and we have to go in, are there – is there a concern about triggering any larger conflict with Russia, perhaps even China?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Well, Laura, it is interesting to see how this glorious day yesterday, where the Venezuelan people rose up to take back their country – it's interesting to see how nations aligned. The free countries, the democratic countries of the world – Brazil, Canada, Chile, Ecuador, Peru, Colombia, the list is long – they sided with freedom and democracy. And the folks who landed on the other side were Iran, Russia, and Cuba, along with China. I think that's very telling. I think that tells you a lot about former President Maduro and the kind of kleptocracy that he was running. And our mission, our mission is to make sure that we do everything we can to keep our people safe while continuing to help the Venezuelan people achieve the outcome which they now are responsible for ultimately achieving.

QUESTION: Well, a lot of this has to do with the money that China has loaned Venezuela – \$65 billion in loans. And I think still Venezuela owes them about 20 billion, so China wants its money back, above probably other things that they want, and influence and power in the Southern Hemisphere. They want that influence, and they want their money back, I imagine.

SECRETARY POMPEO: I think that's right. I think the Cubans have been there running the security apparatus for an awfully long time, much to the detriment of the Venezuelan people. And yesterday a new page was turned. And I'm sure that we haven't seen the last of the efforts of the – the last throes of the Maduro regime, the attempt to sustain power. But your – but your listeners just have to know the United States is committed to helping make this democratic transition successful. We just today authorized some additional money to support the International Red Cross and some others to provide humanitarian relief inside the country.

QUESTION: But if something should befall our diplomats, if there is a standoff, you're not ruling out asking the President to send military help into the region, are you?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Laura, we'll do the things we need to do to make sure we keep our people safe. I don't want to speculate or create a hypothetical situation that we can't account for. But know that the government is fully coordinated. I've spoken with all the other senior leaders in the United

States Government just this morning. I spoke with our chief of mission there on the ground last night at 1700 hours. We have a 24/7 operation center up and running. We are fully engaged, we're fully aware of the situation on the ground, and we're prepared to do what it takes to make sure that we do everything we can to keep our people safe.

QUESTION: On the shutdown issue, Mr. Secretary, you now have former DHS secretaries, including the former White House chief of staff John Kelly, urging the President and the Democrats to reopen the government, especially the budget of DHS needing to be funded. What is your reaction to that? Does that put added pressure on President Trump to give in to the Democrats on this entire issue of the shutdown?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Oh, goodness. Look, count me in in hoping that we can find a path forward to get the government back open. I think that'd be a good thing. But this is a political time, and a important set of issues that are being debated. And so I don't see it putting any more pressure on the President than it does on members of Congress. I didn't see the particular report that you're referring to –

QUESTION: It's been all over.

SECRETARY POMPEO: – but know this: The State Department is fully prepared to do the things we need to do. I've talked to people. I traveled last week throughout the Middle East. We have great patriots working for the State Department who understand that democracy is sometimes a little bit messy. That – Vladimir Putin's government never shuts down. It's unlikely that the ayatollah is going to shut down his government. And so we do have a process that sometimes leads to these things that I think everyone wishes didn't take place, but know that the State Department is prepared to do all that we can to continue to work through these difficult, challenging times.

QUESTION: John Kerry over in Davos – I'm sure you heard – he was asked what he would advise the President.

QUESTION: With that final word then, Secretary Kerry, if you had President Trump sitting right opposite you, what would your message to him be?

SECRETARY KERRY: I can't play that – but I know that – you see, because he doesn't take any of this seriously. He doesn't have an ability to have that kind of conversation.

QUESTION: So what would you say to him to get it through? What would your message be?

SECRETARY KERRY: Resign.

QUESTION: Okay.

QUESTION: Your reaction to that, sir?

SECRETARY POMPEO: To be honest with you, Laura, we don't spend a lot of time thinking about what John Kerry says in this administration. Frankly, we're

trying to clean up his mess and the mess that the previous administration's left us. I think – I think it's pretty outrageous for a former secretary of state to be calling on a president of the United States to resign, but I suppose, beyond that, this isn't the first time John Kerry has behaved in this way that is inconsistent with what I think former secretaries of state ought to do, and I wish it weren't so.

QUESTION: Yeah. Well, I mean, he's – he could have been prosecuted under the Logan Act for what he did in Iran, trying to do the negotiations ahead of everyone else. So it's rich that he would be saying that.

Mr. Secretary, a lot of people are looking forward to new developments perhaps in our – again, it's a trade stand-off with China. As you know, I've supported this move with trade, taking a hard line given the cheating of China. What can you tell us about potential progress with the Chinese given the huge hit they've taken to their economy, much more pronounced than, of course, it's affected our country?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Yeah. So the slowdown in economic growth in China is very real and severe. There's no doubt about that. President Trump has been, as you know, has been pretty clear: we just want – we just want things to be fair and reciprocal. We want a set of arrangements that allow American workers to have the same opportunity that Chinese workers have. We want – we want our companies to be able to sell their goods into China without the risk that their intellectual property will be stolen or that they'll be forced to deliver their technology to the Chinese Government –

QUESTION: I know. Are we any closer?

SECRETARY POMPEO: – in exchange for the right.

QUESTION: Are we any closer?

SECRETARY POMPEO: I think progress is being made. I'm optimistic that Ambassador Lighthizer and Secretary Mnuchin and the team are going to make real progress. I think it's going to take every day between now and the end of the time period the President allotted to dot the Is and cross the Ts. I hope they can come to an outcome that is one that will be consistent with what President Trump has been demanding now for months and months.

QUESTION: And finally – I know you're out of time – are we making any progress – I know you've been working on this – with our Mexican counterparts, AML0 and his team, to help more with this crush of humanity coming up, another 10,000-person caravan, and what's happening at our southern border still? You saw that video of 500 migrants jumping the fence that the *Daily Mail* has posted. It's shocking. What could you do additionally with our Mexican counterparts to end this constant stream of migrants coming up?

SECRETARY POMPEO: So this is a real challenge. It's an enormous national security challenge. It's completely appropriate that the Secretary of State is dealing with this, in addition to our Department of Defense and Department

of Homeland Security. My mission has been, is to try to get the Mexicans to understand this threat, to take seriously the security issues that surround it, to do what they can at their southern border to discourage the transit across Mexico out of Guatemala and Honduras. We've made a little bit of progress with them; there's just a lot more to do. It was – it's disheartening to see the large numbers, to see these caravans moving out of those countries into Mexico headed for our southern border. When I talked to Foreign Minister Ebrard, he understands our concerns deeply and I'm hopeful in the weeks ahead we'll make real progress in reducing this risk to American national security.

QUESTION: Are you worried about Kamala Harris telling MSNBC last night that we have a President who conducts foreign policy by tweets?

SECRETARY POMPEO: (Laughter.) I'm so worried that I had no idea she'd said it. No. This – our foreign policy is conducted in a way that is thoughtful, deliberative, and then forceful, and I think that's all you can ask from a commander-in-chief. I'm proud to be his Secretary of State.

QUESTION: And are you – are you prepared to tell us there'll be a new summit with North Korea in the next 60 days?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Yeah, there'll be one in the next 60 days. That's the plan.

QUESTION: All right. Well, Mr. Secretary, we really appreciate your spending time with us on the Laura Ingraham Podcast. Really appreciate it. I know how busy you are.

SECRETARY POMPEO: Yes, ma'am.

QUESTION: Thank you so much.

SECRETARY POMPEO: Thank you, Laura. Have a good day.

QUESTION: All right. All right. All the best.

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.