

Press Releases: Interview With Martha MacCallum of Fox News

Interview
Michael R. Pompeo

Secretary of State

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QUESTION: You said new winds are blowing in the world and they're positive. You pointed to the Brexit example and also to President Trump. Nations matter, borders matter. One headline said, "Mike Pompeo drops an anti-globalist stink bomb ... with a smile."

SECRETARY POMPEO: (Laughter.) Well, I did smile. Martha, it's good to be with you. What I did was try to explain to those who were sitting there in Davos why it is that America has been an enormous force for good over these two years of the Trump administration, how our policies make not only America safer but the whole world, and contribute to economic growth and wealth creation and freedom all around the world. Those were the things I talked about – the importance of the nation-state as the fundamental building block for national security and, frankly, for stability in regions as well.

It can sometimes seem disruptive. It can sometimes seem like America is acting in ways that are causing trouble, but these fundamental premises that the – that were built out over 70 years ago need to be relooked, and that's what President Trump is driving.

QUESTION: That, obviously, brings to mind NATO and a report the other day that the President had said to top national security officials that he didn't necessarily see the point anymore of NATO. Do you agree?

SECRETARY POMPEO: This administration has done more good for NATO than the previous several administrations combined. The increased resources available for Secretary General Stoltenberg and for NATO partners around the world are significantly greater, approaching now \$100 billion greater than they would have been absent the pressure that President Trump put on. He did that for American national security. That is, we want NATO to be stronger to protect America. But importantly, European nations now are more firmly protected as well.

QUESTION: So it sounds like you think it was a waste of time that the House yesterday went through the process of passing a bill that would reject any effort that the President might make to withdraw from NATO.

SECRETARY POMPEO: Yeah. That's silly.

QUESTION: You look at people like General Mattis and Brett McGurk, who on their way out really made an effort to point out their concerns about the President's adherence to alliances or his confidence in these alliances going forward. And you talk about how the dynamic needs to change – 70 years later, we're in a different world.

SECRETARY POMPEO: President Trump knows that America can't go it alone. We need partners. We've built out coalitions of dozens and dozens of countries to defeat ISIS. We've built an enormous coalition to put pressure on North Korea, to protect not only the United States but Japan, South Korea, and the whole region.

President Trump understands that strong nations will have alliances that work on behalf of their countries and all countries, and so that's what we're trying to do not only with NATO but with every organization around the world. Is it working? Is it delivering security for the American people? If it is, we'll reinforce, and where it's not we'll work to make it better.

This President is committed to ensuring that we have security for the American people, and by that we'll also make sure that the world is safer as well.

QUESTION: But there are some people who ask the question about Article 5. If Montenegro is attacked, should young men and women from the United States fight to defend Montenegro? What's the answer to that?

SECRETARY POMPEO: The answer is coalitions can work when every member of the coalition is doing their fair share. That's how these relationships have worked for an awfully long time. And unfortunately, some countries took a vacation for 20 years and thought that the threats from Russia or from Asia or from all the places in the Middle East and terrorism – they weren't doing what they needed to do to protect their countries. Our urging is this: every country needs to make sure it's contributing enough to make sure that their country is secure, and when they do, America will be with them to support their efforts.

QUESTION: So yes, American soldiers would go to defend Montenegro, if needed?

SECRETARY POMPEO: I'm not going to get into hypotheticals about what might happen or how a certain scenario might unfold, but make no mistake about it: America has always been there when there were important American and global interests at stake.

QUESTION: With regard to the decision to leave Syria – and it's a gradual decision, is what we're seeing play out – two new attacks over the – one attempted and four killed last week in Syria. How long is the commitment there?

SECRETARY POMPEO: I was with the President over— when our Americans were returned on this past Saturday. It's always difficult to be with those families. These are patriots. These are great Americans who sacrificed their life to help keep America safe. President Trump understands that and respects that commitment. And so in Syria, President Trump has made a tactical decision. We're going to withdraw our 2,000 uniformed military personnel from that country, but make no mistake about it: the defeat of the caliphate, the ISIS caliphate in Syria, is almost complete. We're going to stay there till it's done. This threat from radical Islamic terrorism is a global threat, and America will posture itself in a way to ensure that we're doing all that we can to protect the American people from that threat.

QUESTION: So not on the ground, bombing from a distance — is that the way you see it in the future?

SECRETARY POMPEO: I think what President Trump will do is he'll — we'll look at each situation and make the best decision on how to approach it. If it requires American forces to be someplace, we'll do that. President Trump very much wants to end these long, drawn-out — 17 years now in Afghanistan. He says let's find a way to achieve the ends to protect Americans from the threat from radical Islamic terrorism, but let's see if we can do it in a way that is sustainable and makes sense.

QUESTION: What do you say to those like Brett McGurk, who I mentioned before, who say that no one's happier than Russia and Iran when they hear the news that the United States is pulling out of Syria, and likely in the near-term future out of Afghanistan as well?

SECRETARY POMPEO: It's a great question. Let's talk about happiness in Iran and Russia. What is Russia seeing from the Trump administration? Hundreds of sanctions, an enormous military buildup by the United States of America, a missile posture — a missile defense review that makes sure that America will be capable of defending itself not only next year but 20 years from now. I assure you that none of these things sat well with Vladimir Putin.

Let's talk about Iran. Do you think they're happy that the largest set of sanctions ever emplaced on an economy — that is likely to fall into recession by the spring of this year — makes the Iranians happy? To see the global coalition against Iran that has been put in place — not only Arab countries, but countries from Asia and Africa will join us in February in Warsaw for a ministerial that will address Middle East stability and Iran.

I don't think for one moment those two countries believe they're in a better place today with the Trump administration than they were with Barack Obama and John Kerry in charge of this country.

QUESTION: So John Kerry, former Secretary of State, was in Davos. He was asked what advice he would give to President Trump.

[A video was played.]

SECRETARY POMPEO: I must tell you, we don't pay much attention to the advice

that Secretary Kerry's providing to our administration. We're doing our best to clean up the failures that occurred on his watch.

QUESTION: With regard to pulling out of Syria and Afghanistan – that's the plan as well, right, to pull out of Afghanistan?

SECRETARY POMPEO: I'm not going to comment on the future plans and intentions in any of those places. The President will make those announcements when the time is right.

QUESTION: So what do you say to those who look back at Bush doctrine, that it's better to fight them there than fight them here? That was the post-9/11

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SECRETARY POMPEO: Well, Martha, we are. But we are. We are. We took down a caliphate that grew in the previous administration. You remember, Martha. You remember the pictures of people kneeling on beaches and people in cages on fire. This is the space, this is the real estate that ISIS built out prior to the time that the Trump administration came into office. And we literally are in the last set of square kilometers in Syria. We're done in Iraq with the real estate; we took back Mosul. We still have work to do. ISIS and the threat from terrorism remains, to be sure. But we made enormous progress, and we did it there.

QUESTION: You're a former military man. What do you say to those who look at the Kurds who fought alongside us, who don't want to be abandoned there and who feel very vulnerable if we leave their side?

SECRETARY POMPEO: I think the President was very clear about his expectation with how the Kurds will need to be treated after the time that the U.S. military personnel depart. We understand the work that they did alongside of us. It was enormously important and good work, and we're going to ensure that the Kurds have a proper place in Syria after our departure.

QUESTION: And you think that Turkey will abide by that?

SECRETARY POMPEO: I've had lots of conversations. I think we have a way forward.

QUESTION: North Korea. Some look at North Korea and remember the meeting, the first meeting that the President had with Kim Jong-un – shaking hands, President came back, he said no doubt in his mind that the denuclearization process was underway and that it would absolutely happen. Now there are reports that there's a new top-secret missile base, and perhaps 19 new missiles that we can't identify the locations of. Is that progress?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Let me start by saying the American people should be – should rest assured that the United States understands deeply what's taking place in North Korea. Sometimes things pop in press reports and folks act like it's news. The American people should understand that the United States Intelligence Community and our security apparatus knows full well what activities are taking place and, frankly, which ones aren't.

With respect to the negotiation –

QUESTION: Are you saying that those are not taking place?

SECRETARY POMPEO: I just want the American people to understand that the United States Intelligence Community is fully aware of what's going on in North Korea and those things which are not. I don't comment on U.S. intelligence substantively.

Second, with respect to the negotiations, President Trump and I have both, for the – from the very beginning, from the first time I went to North Korea as the CIA director, understand that this is going to be a process that is going to take some time. First step: stopping their testing of their missile program. Second step: stopping their nuclear tests. Those still continue. There's been real progress made. There are many conversations going on. Chairman Kim continues to assure the President of the United States he is intent on denuclearization, and I hope that at the end of February, when the two leaders get together, we can make a substantial step along the way.

QUESTION: Quick question for you on Kansas politics. A lot of speculation out there that you might consider running for Pat Roberts' seat. There were reports that you spent some time over the weekend with Republican strategist Ward Baker to discuss that possibility, and that Mitch McConnell is urging you to run.

SECRETARY POMPEO: Lots of folks have reached out to me and suggested I ought to do that. I have suggested to them that I have a very full plate as Secretary of State, and I intend to keep doing this so long as President Trump will commit to it.

QUESTION: So no intention to get involved in the Senate race in Kansas?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Martha, every day I'm trying to make sure that I'm doing what President Trump wants me to do to keep America safe. That's my singular focus.

QUESTION: Is Mitch McConnell trying to change your mind about that? I know that Kris Kobach, who lost the governor's race there, is considered a possibility to run for that seat.

SECRETARY POMPEO: I spoke to Senator McConnell once. He asked me if I'd think about it, and I told him I appreciated the phone call.

QUESTION: Would you support Kris Kobach if he decides to run in that seat?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Martha, I'm so far out of politics. I think it might even be a federal violation if I answered that question, so I'm going to just say I appreciate your interest.

QUESTION: Secretary Pompeo, thank you very much.

SECRETARY POMPEO: Thank you, Martha.

QUESTION: Great to be with you today.

SECRETARY POMPEO: Wonderful to be with you as well.

QUESTION: Thanks for your time.

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