

Press Releases: Interview With Mohannad Al Khatib of Sky News Arabia

Interview
Michael R. Pompeo

Secretary of State

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QUESTION: Mr. Secretary, thank you so much for being with us on Sky News. How are you doing

SECRETARY POMPEO: It's wonderful to be with you.

QUESTION: Thank you. The United States is reinforcing various sanctions on Iran. We've heard statements over the last few days coming from Tehran that basically amount to threats, (inaudible) in the region, that – some went as far as threatening to close the Strait of Hormuz. How would the United States respond (inaudible) such threat?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Well, it all starts with Iranian bad behavior, the kinds of things that threaten the people here in the Emirates – missiles being launched from Yemen that strike real risk to the people of all of the Gulf states. And so American policy is aimed to deter that.

I've seen these remarks about their threats. The world should know that America is committed to keeping sea lanes open, to keep transit of oil available for the entire world. That's the commitment we've had for decades. We continue to honor that commitment.

QUESTION: Aside from the nuclear issue with Iran, Iran is involved (inaudible) in many destabilizing activities in several countries in the hemisphere: Yemen (inaudible), Syria. What will the United States do in order to limit these activities?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Well, one of the great things is we have wonderful partners like the Emirates, the Saudis, many countries, the Bahrainis are all working alongside of us to push back against Iranian malign behavior, whether it's their activity underwriting the Houthis in Yemen, Hizballah in Syria and in Lebanon, in Iraq and Syria Shia militias that are inflicting real harm on ordinary citizens.

So we intend to do a number of things, though one that we are most focused on today is ensuring that we deny Iran the financial capacity to continue this bad behavior. So it's a broad range, a series of sanctions aimed not at the Iranian people, but rather aimed at the singular mission of convincing the Iranian regime that its malign behavior is unacceptable and has a real high cost for them.

QUESTION: Iran has said several times that they intend to stay in Syria for the long term. How does the United States view this?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Well, Iran needs to get out of Syria. They have no business there. There's no reason for them to be there. There's been Iranian influence there for a long time. Iranian forces, Iranian militias must leave the country.

QUESTION: Also on the issue of the Syrian (inaudible), there is a big (inaudible) going on south of Syria today. The armed groups that were supported at one time by the United States are losing ground. How are you looking at this?

SECRETARY POMPEO: It's a very difficult situation. From the United States perspective, we need to achieve a political solution in Syria, one that reflects the diversity of the Syrian nation. We are aiming to set the conditions for a political resolution. We're prepared to continue the conversations often led by the UN in a way that takes down the violence, de-escalates the threats to the people of Syria, allows the some six million displaced persons from Syria to begin to return and to rebuild, and that ultimately achieves a constitution and a political resolution that's consistent with what the Syrian people truly want and deserve.

QUESTION: Are you in agreement with the Russians on what's going on in the south of Syria today

SECRETARY POMPEO: No, we had an agreement with the Russians that they would not move in the south. There was a de-escalation zone that the Russians had agreed to. They now have clearly violated that and we are working with all parties concerned to get each party – the Russians, the Syrians, the Iranians, everyone to honor the commitments that they've made in the various political processes that have been undertaken with respect to Syria.

QUESTION: You had a tweet a few days ago saying that Iran's activities in Yemen, the – (inaudible) the prolonged suffering of the Yemeni people will not be tolerated. What will Washington do in order to (inaudible)?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Well, we've done a lot of things. We've done work to push back against the threat of al-Qaida in Yemen. We've worked with the Saudis and with the Emiratis to reduce the risk from the Iranian threat there in Yemen through identifying transit of weapons that are moving in and around the region so that the Houthis don't have the material to conduct these threats. We think it's important that every place Iran attempts to use its force we raise the cost for them such that the Iranian people will ultimately reject that use of force.

QUESTION: The U.S. allies in Europe that were part of the 5+1 agreement with Iran are in talks with Iran right now in order to salvage what's left of this agreement. How are you hoping talking to the Europeans about this and how are they responding?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Yeah, it's a great question. I'll actually leave here and headed for Brussels. I'll meet with my European counterparts to talk about exactly this set of issues. Frankly, we agree in large part. The Europeans understand the threat that Iran poses. Indeed, just this past week, there were Iranians arrested in Europe who were preparing to conduct a terror plot in Paris, France. We've seen this malign behavior in Europe. The Europeans understand the threat. We are working through a difference. The American people concluded that the JCPOA made no sense, that it was truly a pathway for Iran to have a nuclear weapon. So we are attempting to stop that. We're working now with the Europeans to develop a plan and a path forward to continue to stop Iran from its nuclear program, but also to push back against its missile system and its terrorist behavior.

QUESTION: Some countries in Europe and in other parts of the world intend to keep on getting oil from Iran even after the sanctions are imposed. How would you look at this?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Well, that will violate the sanctions that we put in place. Come November 4th, there will be a U.S. sanction that prevents crude oil from passing from Iran to other countries. It will be sanctionable activity. We will enforce those sanctions. There will be a handful of countries that come to the United States and ask for relief from that. We'll consider it. But make no mistake about it, we are determined to convince the Iranian leadership that this malign behavior won't be rewarded and that the economic situation in their country will not be permitted to be rectified until such time as they become a more normal nation.

QUESTION: There is an upcoming summit between President Trump and President Putin in Helsinki soon. Will Syria be a major topic to be discussed?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Oh, I'm confident that there will be a broad range of issues discussed. The issues in Ukraine with the Russians and this topic of Russian involvement in Syria will also be part of the conversation between the two leaders.

QUESTION: Mr. Secretary, thank you so much for your (inaudible).

SECRETARY POMPEO: Thank you, sir. Thank you. Thank you very much for your time today.

QUESTION: Thank you.

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