

Press Releases: Interview With Nadia Bilbassy of Al Arabiya

Interview
Michael R. Pompeo

Secretary of State

David Citadel Hotel
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QUESTION: Mr. Secretary, thank you for you time.

SECRETARY POMPEO: It's great to be with you. Thank you.

QUESTION: Let's start with Yemen. How are you going to force or convince the Houthis to come back to the table?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Well, as a first matter, they committed to withdrawing from Hodeidah in Stockholm. They entered into an agreement that said that they would depart. So every expectation is that they will do that. They've not done that yet, and so we are hopeful that they will honor the commitment they made. We will – hopeful that the pressure that we are putting on the Islamic Republic of Iran – who was the primary backstop for the Houthis, providing them not only resources but missile systems that have landed in places like Saudi Arabia – we're very hopeful that this pressure will convince the Houthis that they need to return to the political table, they need to have a discussion, they cannot win this militarily, and that we're determined to ensure that order is restored in Yemen.

QUESTION: Do you think the Iranians instructed them to withdraw from the Sweden agreement?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Hard to know, but I imagine there's very little that the Houthis do that isn't at the direction of the ayatollah or Qasem Soleimani.

QUESTION: Your next step is Beirut. You're going to meet with the president, President Aoun, and the foreign minister. They both said publicly that they're proud to be part of a government that Hizballah, which you consider a terrorist organization, as part of it. How do you square that?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Hizballah is clearly a terrorist organization, and we – in the Trump administration, we call them like they really are. My regret is

that for the past decade the American administration hasn't done nearly enough, hasn't made clear our expectations.

Look, we want good things for the people of Lebanon. You know their tradition. It's a once truly proud, successful economic powerhouse. It can be that again. It can't do so with terrorists as part of their government. It can't be the case that terrorists can occupy places and put missiles that are aimed squarely at Israel. There are risks to Lebanon from that. And the Lebanese people, I think, know this. What they need is they need support from outside to help them, to make sure that there is support and clarity on these issues. And that's what I hope to share with them when I visit tomorrow and the next day in Lebanon.

QUESTION: Are you going to announce sanctions on Hizballah or the Iranian while you're there or here?

SECRETARY POMPEO: So I never get out in front of announcements on sanctions. You'll see them when we announce them.

QUESTION: That's the expectation, that you will say something on this trip.

SECRETARY POMPEO: Yeah, we'll see.

QUESTION: Why you haven't declared or announced that the Revolutionary Guard – the Iranian Revolutionary Guard – on the State Department terrorist list? The Treasury put them on, but not the State Department.

SECRETARY POMPEO: Yeah. We're constantly looking at which groups we will designate, which ones we'll choose not to. In each case, we're trying to make a determination how we can best effectuate our policy. Remember the objective. The objective is to convince the Islamic Republic of Iran to support its people that don't want this. They don't want the country assassinating people in Europe; they don't want their country supporting Hamas; they don't want their money going for Hizballah and the Houthis. Our mission is we think about everything we do tactically, whether it's a designation or a sanction that we put in place. Our mission set is to convince the Islamic Republic of Iran to do what its people want and to behave like a normal nation.

QUESTION: Is this any backchannel between the United States and Iran?

SECRETARY POMPEO: If there was, would I tell you?

QUESTION: Well, we know later it happened with the Obama administration.

SECRETARY POMPEO: Yes. Our mission set with respect to Iran is very, very clear.

QUESTION: You imposed biting sanction on the Iranians. You say the economy is in bad shape, yet they call the shot in Lebanon, in Yemen, in Iraq, and in Syria. Are you failing to confront their expansion?

SECRETARY POMPEO: No, I don't think we are. We started in a really bad place.

Remember, the previous administration's policy was very different. They entered into the JCPOA, which guaranteed Iran a path to a nuclear weapon. We pulled out of it. They sidled up to the Iranian regime. Most of what – most of the missile systems that you're seeing today, these are things that were developed under the JCPOA. Most of the terror that you've seen began and continued during the time of the JCPOA.

We've fundamentally shifted course. We're beginning our efforts. There's more work to do. I'm convinced that not only the United States but the coalition that we have built – right, our partners in the Gulf states, our partners here in Israel – I'm convinced that the coalition that we've built that understands the threat that the Islamic Republic of Iran presents to the world will ultimately convince them to do what the Iranian people richly deserve.

QUESTION: On Syria, sir, why you keeping 400 troops there? Is this any deal with the Russians?

SECRETARY POMPEO: No, we're continuing the mission that we've had since the beginning of this administration, which is the defeat of the caliphate and ultimately pushing back against radical Islamic terrorism wherever we find it. Decisions on specific troop levels change. They change over time. Our footprint, how we confront that terrorism, changes. We conduct it differently in Asia and in Africa and in the Middle East over time. We try to bring the right tools to bear, the right instruments of power to bear, to achieve the outcome, which is soon the complete destruction of the caliphate and then the continued pressure on radical Islamic terrorism, whether it's al-Qaida or ISIS or anyone else.

QUESTION: You said Jerusalem is still a final status issue. Does that mean that East Jerusalem will be the capital of a Palestinian state in the future?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Yeah, we're not going to make any announcements about the plan. Soon enough, we will share our vision for how this intractable problem, now decades on, might be resolved.

QUESTION: So you're going to impose it on the Palestinians, even if they don't participate?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Stay tuned.

QUESTION: Okay. We're going to ask you about the self-autonomy. I mean, I have to try with this one. There is talk that –

SECRETARY POMPEO: All right. Keep trying.

QUESTION: – the Israelis – well, there's some talks that actually you're going have self-autonomy for the Palestinians, but not a Palestinian state. Is this something that we can consider?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Yeah, look, there have been lots of people talking about what's in the vision that we'll put out. What I think I can share with folks today, before the time that we introduce our vision, is we want a better life

for the Palestinian people. The Palestinian people live next to Israel. This is going to be the case. We want each of them to have – be able to have a life for themselves and for their children and their grandchildren that is better than the one they have today, with a decreased risk of violence. And when you see the vision, when you see the plan that is presented, I think the whole world will see how America's thinking about this. Ultimately, this will be resolved between the Palestinians and Israel, but America trying to put its vision forward I think will potentially break the logjam.

QUESTION: Two quick question on Israel. You said you don't interfere with Israel election. You appear with Prime Minister Netanyahu and he's meeting with President Trump on Monday. Is that a political statement?

SECRETARY POMPEO: No, not at all. The pressing issues of the day, the issues that I work on nearly every day, don't wait for election cycles. I remind people that Qasem Soleimani doesn't care about your election. He's continuing to challenge Israel today, tomorrow. He'll do it on election day as well. These are not things that are timed against elections. These are important relationships between the United States and Israel, security efforts, economic relationships between the two countries, and they happen no matter who's having an election, whether it's here in Israel or in the United States.

QUESTION: Finally, will you allow Mr. Jonathan Pollard to come back with Mr. Netanyahu?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Yeah, I don't have anything to share with you on that today.

QUESTION: Thank you so much, Mr. Secretary.

SECRETARY POMPEO: Thank you very much. It was wonderful to be with you.

QUESTION: Likewise.

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