

Press Releases: Interview With Najwa Kassem of Al Arabiya

Interview
Michael R. Pompeo

Secretary of State

Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates
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QUESTION: (In Arabic.) Good afternoon.

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

QUESTION: Mr. Secretary, it's our honor to be with us as you always were. Actually, it was a busy trip, very busy trip, and you still have more stops in it. But main thing we can understand from your speech in Cairo, from what you said about the Poland summit and meeting in Poland, that it's Iran. And this is the main goal, a very hard speech against Iran, and sort of alliance, something like this, to face the role of Iran in the region. What's the plan?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Yeah, so it's been a fantastic trip, I – this swing through the Gulf states now following my initial visits. Really three things we're working on, different for each of our partners around the world, but America's here, and this is important to us. Middle East stability, destroying ISIS, completing the destruction of the caliphate are very important missions for the United States – and countering Iran. The threat from the world's largest state sponsor of terror, the Islamic Republic of Iran, is something President Trump has identified as one of his top priorities. We're determined to do that, and we'll do it with our partners throughout the Middle East. This is a mission for the world. It's incredibly important, and we are determined to do it. I wanted to make sure that I got the chance to swing through the region one more time – I've been here a lot in my life –

QUESTION: Yes.

SECRETARY POMPEO: – to come back one more time and reassure them that America is committed to this and talk about how we're going to execute it.

QUESTION: But what can we understand about what's going to happen in Poland? Is it the MESA, what you're calling MESA? Is it another sort of alliance, or what? What kind of meetings it will be –

SECRETARY POMPEO: Yeah, so that's a great question. The ministerial in Warsaw will be much broader than that. We will have countries from Asia, Africa, Western Hemisphere, countries from South America – this will be a broad coalition aimed at Middle East stability. We'll talk about how we counter terror. There'll be a focus on Iran. There'll be conversations about financial systems, how is it we ensure the financial systems don't sponsor terror. There'll be a broad conversation from a large group – dozens and dozens of countries we expect to attend over the course of the ministerial. It's the first time we've put together a ministerial this way, and we think it will show the whole world that there's a broad determination to make life better here and take the terror regimes down in the region.

QUESTION: But with America withdrawing from Syria – at least for the time being of course; you still have a presence in Iraq but not compared to presence in the last decade. You are determined for this but you are withdrawing from Syria. This is something you consider not contradicted, and you didn't see it contradict also what the – Mr. Bolton's statement regarding Turkey, same issue. But how can we understand this?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Yeah. No, there's no contradiction at all. America supports fights against terror all around the world. Sometimes we do it with U.S. soldiers, sometimes we do it with forces from partner countries. Sometimes we do it in other ways – diplomatic means, economic means, financial means, building out coalitions. There are many tools in the power projection arsenal. And so no terrorist, no Iranian should believe that the fact that a couple thousand U.S. soldiers are going to be redeployed out of Syria in any way diminishes our commitment.

QUESTION: It's said in the U.S., especially at the time at the turn of the former president, that our enemies don't hear us and our friends don't trust us. This is something I heard in previous interviews. So in that context, do you think Iran fears what's going on now?

SECRETARY POMPEO: I want the Iranian people to know that we want a better life for them. We want the Iranian people's voices to be heard. We want a real democracy in the Islamic Republic of Iran. And a real democracy doesn't support Hizballah. A real democracy doesn't support Shia militias in Iraq that are reducing Iraqi independence. A real democracy wouldn't be active in Yemen in the way that they are by underwriting the Houthis today. We want the Iranian people's voices to be heard, and so we don't want them to fear us. We want them to know that we're here, we hear them, and we want a better life for the people in Iran as well.

QUESTION: And last answer, you were talking about forces – you said our forces, or other partners' forces. This is something maybe (inaudible) now about maybe replacing the American forces but by forces from other countries as well. This is what the Turkish are saying at least in the analysis. Can you explain this? Which partners' forces?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Yeah. Different countries will have to make their own decisions about how they're going to participate in this coalition. Some will make a decision to have their forces there. I don't want to get into where

the discussions are sitting today. But know that we value each time a country makes a decision to put its young men and women in harm's way. It's a big decision for a sovereign state to make. And we're very hopeful that we will continue to find the right mix, the right set of power projection tools to achieve our ultimate objectives.

But at the end of the day, what we want in Syria is a political resolution. We're driving towards enforcing UN Security Council Resolution 2254 so that we can get a political resolution in Syria, one that allows now some 6 million people who've had to leave their homes that are displaced persons –

QUESTION: Six million outside the country? There is other six? Displaced in –

SECRETARY POMPEO: And more than that – inside – they're internally displaced, yeah. So we're talking about enormous numbers, millions and millions of people who have had to flee their homes because of the conflict in Syria. That's the mission set, is to create the political conditions so those people can return and they can once again restore power to the people in Syria as well.

QUESTION: That's what the MESA is about?

SECRETARY POMPEO: No, MESA is a broader effort than that. MESA's not specifically aimed at the Syria challenge. MESA is a –

QUESTION: Military aspect?

SECRETARY POMPEO: No, even the military aspect of MESA, it's broader than that. It's an attempt to build a coalition of Middle Eastern forces that can respond to many threats to the region, not just the one that's in Syria today.

QUESTION: And that – speaking about Syria and about the American presence there, American-Turkish relations have been really volatile, very volatile in the last few months. Now how can we describe them? We've heard that they have been okay a few – couple of months ago, now it seems after what happened with Mr. Bolton's statement, more like tense?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Yeah, I think that's all been misreported and overblown. The conversations that Ambassador Bolton had with his – in Turkey were very productive. We are trying to chart a path forward. As we withdraw our 2,000 uniformed military personnel from Syria – which we are going to do – as we do that, we want to make sure that we do – we do right by the Turks. That is, to the extent they have terrorist threats on their border, they're entitled to do what they need to do to protect the Turkish people, and we want to make sure at the same time that the forces that we fought with in the region, who aren't terrorists – those forces who aren't terrorists – are protected from threats from all the folks in the region. We were trying to create an orderly, successful, deliberate departure of our forces, and I'm confident that we can do that. And our conversations with the Turks in that respect have been very productive.

QUESTION: Uh-huh. Okay. Let me ask you, Mr. Secretary, about the relations

with Saudi Arabia. This has been a very important headline in the American press, as well as in the American politics. How can you talk about it?

SECRETARY POMPEO: So I'll be heading to Saudi Arabia tomorrow. We'll have another set of constructive conversations, I'm very, very sure. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is an important partner of the United States. They've been very helpful to us on multiple things that matter to the American people, and I'm convinced that partnership will remain strong. We know there's been this

QUESTION: Partnership, not friendship?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Call it what you will. They've been great partners in the missions that we have asked them to assist us with. We understand that the murder of Jamal Khashoggi was a heinous, terrible act. We want to hold everyone responsible for that accountable. We intend to do so. We started that already. But this relationship, this mutually beneficial relationship to create stability in the Middle East and to assist the United States in executing things that keep the American people safe is very important. And I'm convinced the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia will be a great ally in doing so.

QUESTION: I'm sorry, I know it's almost over, but just because you mentioned Jamal Khashoggi, I want to – you to tell the Saudis, the Arab viewers – we felt for some time that the whole relation between U.S. and Saudi Arabia was only this mattered, the matter of Khashoggi. How can you respond to this?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Yeah. President Trump's made it clear since the immediate aftermath of this murder that the relationship is broader and deeper and bigger than that. We absolutely have expectations when things go wrong, when heinous acts are – have occurred, people need to be held accountable for those. But this relationship predated that, and the relationship must go forward. We have to have a good relationship with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, and this administration intends to do so.

QUESTION: Thank you so much, Mr. Secretary of the –

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

QUESTION: (Inaudible.) Thank you so much for this interview.

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