

Press Releases: Interview With Pirkko Pontinen of YLE TV1

Interview
Michael R. Pompeo

Secretary of State

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QUESTION: Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, thank you for this opportunity to meet and make an interview with the Finnish Broadcasting Company.

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

QUESTION: Thank you so much. The last time you were in Finland, it was last July for a summit for President Trump and Putin. And that time you also met your Russian counterpart, Sergey Lavrov. It was the first time, but is it right it will be the second time now when you will meet him face to face?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Yeah, I think I've run into him in other forums before, but this will be the second time that we've had the opportunity to meet here in Finland.

QUESTION: How do you describe your personal relationship to Mr. Lavrov when you keep in mind that the current tensions between your country and Russia? How is it working with him?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Well, we talk often on the phone. I'd say we've met a handful of times. The conversations are always very direct, they're very professional, each of us doing our level best to represent what our leaders are asking us to do. Our relationship is just fine.

QUESTION: And you have a lot of topics to talk about. Just in your talk just moments ago, you talked about Arctic waters and area, and about the commercial purposes and also the military purposes. And you had very strong words towards especially China, but also towards Russia, now when Russia is under international sanctions and basically there is no cooperation between your country and Russia anymore. So how do you – being – the U.S. can be aware of what Russia is doing on Arctic area now when the relations are very tense?

SECRETARY POMPEO: I think we have a deep understanding of what Russia's doing here. It's visible; you can see it. Our presence here, we see the actions they're taking. Our national security team makes sure that we do the work to track their actions here as well. We want every nation to have the opportunity to participate in the great things that can be here in the Arctic region. We want fair and open markets, we want free transit, we want the rule of law. Each of those are things we want. What we don't want is countries like Russia using military power to deny passage for ships that have a right to pass, and to ban things that are inconsistent with international law. If there are good neighbors here in the Arctic region and if Russia becomes one of them, we would welcome that.

QUESTION: But your words were not the same towards –

SECRETARY POMPEO: Well, you can – we can see the behavior. I mean, we should also – and when I speak with Foreign Minister Lavrov, I'll be clear about this too – we're demanding that they behave according to the rule of law. It's pretty straightforward. It's the same thing we ask Finland to do. It's no different.

QUESTION: But you didn't have the same words towards China. Actually, you were – if I understood, you were – you have very strong rules against China, and you like to limit its presence in the Arctic waters. So you see China as a threat in this area?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Well, China is not an Arctic nation. There are many non-Arctic nations. China should receive no special status. There are Arctic nations, and non-Arctic nations. Different sets of rules necessarily will apply. You'll have entitlements under the Law of the Sea; there are lots of rules that apply to those who are in the region. But what we do want to make sure is there is free and fair and open navigation, and China is welcome to participate in that. And if they are prepared to come up here and invest commercially on a straight, transparent basis using private enterprise to do so, but not as a façade, not coming up here ostensibly as a commercial entity but creating a debt trap for countries so that they can ultimately foreclose and seize that property – those are the kind of behaviors we've seen in other parts of the world, and the Arctic is too important to let that happen.

QUESTION: So would you like a – are you saying that the United States would like to change the role of the Arctic Council from environmental issues towards these military and strategic – I'm sorry, I can't pronounce – questions, more of that – more on that side?

SECRETARY POMPEO: We can do it – we can do it all. It's not – one doesn't have to choose one over the other. Indeed, they are related, right? If we don't get this – the security piece right, then the capacity to do all the great things we want on environmental issues and other issues will all be lost. So it's not possible to simply focus on one without the other, nor is there any necessity to do so. I'm convinced we can do all of that. This Arctic Council is an important organization. It's small, it's nimble, it's eight countries. I am confident we can find ways to cooperate together for the betterment of this region.

QUESTION: One of the topics you will – if we are – we have been informed is Venezuela, which you are going to talk with Mr. Lavrov, and now Russia and United States have opposite views of who will be in the head of the country. So is it so that a solution in Venezuela is not anymore in the hands of Venezuelan people?

SECRETARY POMPEO: No, just the opposite. No, this decision is being made by the Venezuelan people each and every day. They held an election. Their constitution required that the National Assembly select an interim president when a fraudulent election was held. They did so. They elected Juan Guaido. The Venezuelan people are speaking. They're demanding democracy. They're demanding that their country not be hijacked by a socialist and by Cubans, who have destroyed their economy. You have children starving in the streets of Venezuela. That is not acceptable to Venezuelan people, and the Organization of American States, the Lima Group, 54 countries are all joined together to help that poor child that is starving. That's the mission set.

QUESTION: But anyway, that's one of the questions you will have with Mr. Lavrov. So what are you discussing about?

SECRETARY POMPEO: I'm sure we'll talk about a range – a broad range of subjects. It won't surprise me if Venezuela comes up.

QUESTION: And the very last question, which is in – we Finns are very much interested in is concerns of the icebreakers. It is not easy for State Department, it's more for Homeland Security.

SECRETARY POMPEO: Right.

QUESTION: But does State Department support the deal to buy possibly six more new icebreakers from Finland?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Right, we have one right now –

QUESTION: Yeah, only one.

SECRETARY POMPEO: – ready to commence construction, five more to go after that, and the State Department is fully supportive. I hope we can do them quickly.

QUESTION: Can you say anything more? Is that all that's (inaudible)?

SECRETARY POMPEO: In terms of timing?

QUESTION: Mm-hmm.

SECRETARY POMPEO: No, I don't know that the timing is set for the follow-ons, but the Department of Homeland Security and the State Department are all on board with doing this just as quickly as we can. We think it's incredibly important and we want to get it done.

QUESTION: Thank you, Secretary of State.

SECRETARY POMPEO: Yes, ma'am, thank you.

QUESTION: Thank you, sir.

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