

Press Releases: Interview With Sean Hannity on Hannity

Interview
Michael R. Pompeo

Secretary of State

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QUESTION: Mr. Secretary, good to see you. I see this as a massive national security issue. It deals with relations, obviously, with Mexico. It's about drugs being brought into the country, human trafficking, criminals, gang members, some people that have ties to terror. Why shouldn't we all view this as a national security issue?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Well, Sean, thanks for having me on tonight. We should. We should all be very serious about this. I've been the CIA director. I'm now the Secretary of State. This has enormous national security implications. Border security is an important part of American sovereignty and keeping Americans safe. There is a central role to make sure that we know who is coming in and what is coming in to our country, and President Trump is doing the right thing in making sure we understand what's moving across that border, and we do so with enough border security so we have confidence and we can do this on behalf of the American people.

QUESTION: We've been able to apprehend 3,700 people that we have identified as having ties to terror?

SECRETARY POMPEO: There's lots of risks associated. The narcotics risk itself has enormous implications for people inside the United States. There are lots of things that come across that southern border that we need to get control over, and President Trump is determined to make that happen. It includes the risk that we have terrorists come across that border.

QUESTION: We're talking about Central America, but you've had a pretty busy year. We have the talks with North Korea, talk about denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula. We have issues now with China. We also have issues with the Middle East, new alliances, opportunities hopefully emerging, certainly with Israel, with the Iranian deal being drawn back. Where do you see on the world stage, where is America different now? Because I don't think the President gets a lot of credit for a lot of progress around the world.

SECRETARY POMPEO: Oh, Sean, we have made fundamental changes in American foreign policy that enormously benefit the American people. I could tick through the same list of places that you spoke about. The previous administration had decided that the world's largest state sponsor of terror was the partner in the Middle East, Iran. We have fundamentally flipped that. We know that that is a real threat to the world and to America, and so we have developed relationships with Arab countries and Israel. We've brought them together to develop a coalition to keep Americans safe from things going on in the Middle East.

You spoke first, I think, about North Korea. Lots of work that is left to be done, but I am confident that in the next short period of time President Trump and Chairman Kim will get the chance to meet again and truly create a much better, safer America with less threat of not only nuclear weapons being launched at us but nuclear proliferation as well. These are real risks and real changes from the previous administration's policies.

QUESTION: All right, let's talk specifically about North Korea. So the President has been hinting and saying that there's going to be another meeting with Kim Jong-un. Will that be about and will there be the potential at that meeting of the denuclearization of the entire peninsula? Obviously, missiles aren't being fired, remains have been sent back, hostages have been released, so a lot of progress. Is this where you might close that deal?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Sean, I'd be surprised if we get all the way home in this meeting, although it would be fantastic if we did. I don't want to tell you exactly what our negotiating strategy is, but suffice it to say I think we have set the conditions where we can make real progress when Chairman Kim and President Trump meet and take down the threat to the United States and to the world that has been, frankly, holding America hostage for so long in North Korea. It'll be good for South Korea. It'll be good for Japan. It'll be good for all of the world.

QUESTION: But putting aside the Khashoggi incident, there seemed to be an emerging new alliance against Iranian hegemony, and that would be the United States, our closest ally is Israel, the Saudis, Egyptians, Jordanians, up till recently the Emirates, against the Iranians. Do you see an opportunity, a historic opportunity, where these alliances could lead to a peace that nobody could even have been thinking about 10 years ago?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Sean, undoubtedly, we have set the conditions in the Middle East where these countries are now working together across multiple fronts. You saw the President's announcement about our withdrawal from Syria. We're still going to be able to effectively with those partners counter the threat from ISIS in the region, and we'll do it without those 2,000 soldiers on the ground. We haven't changed our policy about continuing to make sure that there is no ISIS resurgence, and we're just going to do it in a way that is smarter and better. And we can do that because of the alliances that President Trump has built.

QUESTION: All right, let's talk about China in the sense they've had a massive military buildup, but your State Department issued a warning to

Americans traveling to China that, in fact, they could issue exit bans preventing Americans from leaving. What's the status?

SECRETARY POMPEO: But, Sean, we didn't change the level of the warning there in China. We did change some of the language. We do our best here to constantly review things that might happen to Americans who are traveling abroad. We saw what happened with the American there in Russia. Our job is to always have Americans safe who are traveling, and we wanted to let them know that there have been more risks from what China has done in terms of folks traveling there and not being permitted to return. We just wanted to make them aware of that, and I am hopeful that we got the language just right so Americans will understand the risk but still travel there when it's appropriate.

QUESTION: Let's talk about the latest in terms of the relationships with Russia – obviously a hostile regime, obviously a hostile actor in Vladimir Putin. Not only the United States but other countries have experienced their cyber warfare, if you will, or their desire to create chaos in other countries. But if you can address that and also their support of the Iranians, their influence in Syria, and do you see an Iranian-Russia-Syrian alliance that would worry you?

SECRETARY POMPEO: I am concerned about that, and frankly, the Russians' behavior has not been good. But this administration has been very serious at responding to that, whether it was the strike that President – the strikes the President has taken in Syria – those were in Syria but the Russians were all around it, our effort with respect to what the Russians did in Skripal, the sanctions we've put on Russian oligarchs who have threatened America and American interests. Those are real responses.

We've done that, Sean, at the same time that we're trying to find space where we can work with them, trying to find opportunities where the Russians' and American interests overlap even if our value sets do not so that we can work together against some of these most difficult problems. It's been tough, and Vladimir Putin has not cooperated, but we're still trying to find a place to do that.

QUESTION: The President has some critics as it relates to saying that he wants to withdraw from Syria and Afghanistan. Is there a timetable, or will it be based on the situation on the ground?

SECRETARY POMPEO: The President has always been very clear that he wanted to get our soldiers back home. In Syria he's made that decision, and we are working in that direction. That decision's done, and we will withdraw from Syria.

The timeline, it will be consistent with what we can do to make sure that our soldiers are safe, that we continue the counter-ISIS campaign, that we do all that we can to keep the coalition against Iran together. Those are also things that the President has made very clear he was going to do when he visited Iraq now – goodness – a week ago. He made very clear that those were things that were also important. So we will manage those threats to America,

but we will do so without a couple thousand folks on the ground in Syria.

QUESTION: I wouldn't even venture a guess how many frequent flyer miles you have as a result of just the one year. We've been friends a long time. I know how hard you're working and how much success is happening on the world stage. Secretary Pompeo, thanks for joining us.

SECRETARY POMPEO: Sean, thank you very much. Have a good evening.

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