

Press Releases: Remarks at the 36th Annual Jewish Institute for National Security of America Awards Dinner

Remarks
Michael R. Pompeo

Secretary of State

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SECRETARY POMPEO: Tom, thank you for the kind introduction. Catherine, it's great to see you. Catherine Herridge is my favorite reporter, but you should know that's a low bar. (Laughter.) I –

MS HERRIDGE: You were my favorite congressman. (Laughter.)

SECRETARY POMPEO: I – (laughter). Fair enough. (Applause.) Catherine is not only a very talented reporter but an incredibly capable woman, and she and her husband are good friends of Susan and mine. So thank you, thank you for

being part of this event tonight.

Tom, those were very kind remarks. Jefferson and Madison, Pompeo – it doesn't quite roll off the tongue. (Laughter.) But one can always live in hope.

I was also reminded when you said that I'm the 70th Secretary of State, and reminded that there's only 45 presidents, so that means there's a lot more turnover in my job than in his, and so I'm going to enjoy the moment. (Laughter.)

Thank you to Dr. Makovsky for having me here tonight, and thank you, everyone at JINSA, for this award. I want to accept it on behalf of the entire diplomatic corps, the entire United States State Department. And I'll also accept it as a challenge to keep my foot on the gas at the Department of State. (Applause.)

I see a lot of friends here tonight, and I know you all have had a long day, but it is worth recounting what we've done in this administration over the first now coming on 20 months. Let me start with just a basic fact: In the entire Middle East, there is only one consistently pro-American, free-enterprise, democratic nation; it's the people of the State of Israel. And this administration understands that deeply. (Applause.)

For the previous eight years, we had an administration that showed more respect to the leaders of Iran than to the people of Israel.

President Obama thought he – thought if he made dangerous concessions, removed economic sanctions, and flew a plane full of cash to Tehran, he could somehow hug Iran's leaders into behaving well and rejoining the community of nations.

But those leaders aren't from a Disney movie. They're real. They're not tragically misunderstood. They are murderers and funders of terrorism who lead chants – today, still – of "Death to America." Their goals include profiting off the misery of their own people and wiping Israel off the face of the Earth.

By and large, I think the American people understand the threat that Iran poses. It's why they opposed the deal that the previous administration made by a margin of two to one, and it's why they sent to our country a very different kind of president in 2016.

Today, after just under two years, there's a long list. Tom talked about some of them. But it's worthy of just grinding through real fast because the magnitude of the change is extraordinary.

Tom mentioned the move of the U.S. embassy to Jerusalem and recognized Jerusalem as Israel's capital. Common sense, I think.

He pulled out of the JCPOA and imposed some of the harshest sanctions in history on the regime in Iran to change its behavior, and more are to follow.

He supported the commitment of the largest-ever security support of \$3.8

billion annually.

And he took a stand against anti-Semitism on the world stage by withdrawing from the U.N. Human Rights Council.

We have also exposed Hamas for what it really is, and we are making a truly historic push for peace between Israel and the Palestinians.

The bottom line? I think – I actually had the privilege to speak with Prime Minister Netanyahu today on a couple of issues of the moment, and we were talking about things a little more broadly, and it reminds me that the bottom line is that the U.S.-Israel relationship is stronger today than it has been ever. And that's good. (Applause.) And that's good for – it's good for both countries. And I want to talk for just a minute, and then I'm going to take a few questions. I want to talk about the challenges that Iran is presenting to Israel, to America, and, indeed, to the world.

Iran has seen this instability in Syria as a golden opportunity to tip the scales. Its goals have included expanding the reach of its Revolutionary Guard, gaining an entrenched position near the Golan Heights, and, ultimately, establishing a second front from which proxies like Hizballah can terrorize the Israeli people.

Today the Syrian conflict is reaching a new juncture. Assad has tightened his grip thanks to Russia, Iran, and other regional actors.

ISIS, though not completely snuffed out, has been beaten into a shadow of its former self. And these changing circumstances have required the reassessment of America's mission in Syria. Defeating ISIS, which was once our primary focus, continues to be a top priority, but it will now be joined by two other mutually reinforcing objectives. These include a peaceful and political resolution to the Syrian conflict and the removal of all Iranian and Iranian-backed forces from Syria. (Applause.)

Under President Trump's leadership, the Department of State has been now engaged in a months-long diplomatic process aimed at making headway on each of these three strategic objectives.

Last month at the U.N. General Assembly in New York, I expressed our full support for U.N. Security Council Resolution 2254, which sets a political process for ending this conflict in Syria. And we're urging every nation to support it.

At the UN we were also encouraged to find increasing international consensus that Iran and its proxies must not be allowed to maintain a foothold in Syria. The onus for expelling Iran from the country falls on the Syrian Government, which bears responsibility for its presence there.

We've been clear: if Syria doesn't ensure the total withdrawal of Iranian-backed troops, it will not seek – not receive one single dollar from the United States for reconstruction.

Our efforts at the U.N. were just a small public window into our efforts.

I've named a team. Spearheading our effort is Special Representative Jim Jeffrey. Many of you would know him. Nobody understands the web of regional interests and the political complexities better than he does. His resume includes ambassadorships in Albania, in Turkey, and Iraq, among much other parts of his storied career in diplomacy.

Meanwhile, to coordinate our efforts on Iran, I've asked Brian Hook to lead our Iran Action Group. We are leading a historic international campaign to apply diplomatic and economic pressure against the Islamic Republic of Iran. Our goal is simple, is to cut off the revenues the regime uses to spread terror and chaos, to fund its nuclear programs, and line its own pockets with money that should be given to the Iranian people.

The State Department's diplomacy itself is just one part of our interagency effort all across this administration.

Underlying this approach is President Trump's unwavering belief that Israel – like all nations – has the right to defend its own sovereignty. (Applause.) That means we'll continue to stand up for its right to target Iranian-backed militias within Syria for as long as that threat remains.

Now, I want to leave plenty of time for discussion, so let me close with just one last thought.

Israel is everything we want the entire Middle East to look like going forward.

It is democratic and prosperous. It desires peace. And it is a home to a free press and a thriving free market economy.

Compare that to Iran, whose corrupt leaders assault the human rights of their own people, finance terrorism, and undermine U.S. interests in every corner of the Middle East.

Rarely in world affairs is the contrast between two sides so stark.

Under President Trump's leadership, the United States is standing where it should firmly be: on the side of Israel. (Applause.)

I want to close by again thanking you all for being here. To get an award that was named after Scoop Jackson is truly meaningful to me, as an amateur historian, and I think important for the Department of State to recognize the good work that it is doing. I will have the opportunity tomorrow to share this with each and every one of the folks who works for me.

Thank you all so very much. I look forward to a few questions. (Applause.)

DR MAKOVSKY: All right. I want to thank you very – everybody hear me all right? Okay. I want to thank you very much again, Secretary Pompeo. And as we said earlier this evening, the efforts of yourself, the President, and the rest of the administration has certainly made America stronger, and made Israel stronger, and we just really – we all applaud it and commend it. So thank you very much. I want to just thank you again. (Applause.)

SECRETARY POMPEO: Thank you. Thank you all.

DR MAKOVSKY: I want to ask the first question about Iran. You mentioned you – the administration, to their credit, is – you’re imposing the toughest sanctions, re-imposing the sanctions, but imposing them in a very tough way, commendably.

Let me ask you that – at JINSA, we propose a range of ways of broadening the policy or a range of other policies. I just wanted to raise it with you, and I wanted to get your thoughts about that or other policies that you might be thinking about in ways that pressure the Iranians. For instance, interdicting arms shipments from Iran to Syria and Yemen, whether the United States could be more active in that. Giving Israel more tools – given that Israel is on the front lines, giving Israel more tools to confront the Iranians, and in a likely future war, such as by frontloading the 10-year MOU which just kicked in on defense aid. Supporting Syrian Kurdish – either strong autonomy or independence and offering to protect them. They’re our allies with ISIS, and also – but to do that also is a way to prevent the Iranian-backed Assad regime from reclaiming control over the whole thing.

And lastly, I would say pursuing a policy of – to use an old 1950s term – of rollback of the Iranians. And I – these are some ideas that, among others, that we’ve raised at JINSA, and I was curious if you’ve considered some of these or others. We’d love to hear other ways that the State Department and the administration might be considering of pressuring the Iranians.

SECRETARY POMPEO: So the sanctions get a lot of the headlines. The policy that President Trump has put in place is much broader than that. I can’t go into all the details on each of those. We don’t have time for all of that. But there’s a lot of work being done on interdiction. You don’t see it all, it’s not very noisy; I did some of it in my former job. It’s a full range of things to do the simple task of convincing the Iranian leaders to behave like a normal nation.

I listed 12 things that the Iranians have to do for us to get back in a relationship with them, and when you read through them they’re nothing more than what we ask Belgium to do, right? Like stop launching rockets into major international airports, for starters. It’s really – it seemed daunting, but at the end of the day, just be it. Just be a normal country. But it’s not just sanctions.

So five capitals, right? Beirut, Damascus, Sanaa, Tehran itself, and Baghdad. Those are the pressure points. That’s the dream of the Islamic Republic for hegemony and we are pushing back in each of those capitals, in each of those places, with every tool available to the United States Government to achieve that goal: to get the Iranian regime to behave like a normal nation.

DR MAKOVSKY: Okay. You want to address those others or I’ll just move on to the next question?

SECRETARY POMPEO: I’ll come back to them.

DR MAKOVSKY: Yeah, okay, sure. The other suggestion was – it was about how – ways we can help Israel further and also what our policy is about the Syrian Kurds who have been our allies with the – against ISIS and so on.

SECRETARY POMPEO: So look, we've worked closely with the Syrian Kurds now for my entire time in service in this administration. They have been great partners. We are now driving to make sure that they have a seat at the table. The political process that I referred, the hardest part, the reason it hasn't made progress is because we've demanded that every element in Syria gets an opportunity to be part of that future government, and in the absence of that and in the absence of their representation, we won't participate in what will be a big check that someone's going to have to write to fix the situation in Syria, and the Syrian Kurds will surely be part of that.

DR MAKOVSKY: And how would you define the administration's overall objective? I used the term "rollback" which doesn't – "containment" was maybe the policy perhaps – perhaps at times of the previous administration, but how would you define, if you had to think of a couple words to define the objectives we have towards Iran?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Yeah. I mean, I don't know how else to say it. We won't be settled until we have solved each of the files adequately, right? A permanent solution to ensure that Iran never has the capacity to have a nuclear weapon for all time, in any form. (Applause.) And second – second – to push back against this terror regime which is not only taking place in Iraq and in Syria and in Lebanon, but in European capitals, around the world. It's remarkable and we – I hope we can get more support from our European partners of this effort. I'm convinced that we will over time.

And then, finally, I'll put the other bucket, the broader set of Iranian malign activity – there's much of it – and that's the mission statement. I don't know how to put it into three or four words, but it's to take each of those three spaces and ensure that Iran ceases its current activity which is so fundamentally detrimental to the world and, frankly, very detrimental to Iran's own people.

DR MAKOVSKY: Okay. I want to ask you about Turkey. Not really, unless you want to raise it, about what's been in the news in the last few days with the Saudi consulate there. I actually want to ask you a different question about Turkey.

There are two things. One is: Would a sale of our F-35s to Turkey proceed if Turkey takes delivery of Russian S – of S-400s? That was the first one.

SECRETARY POMPEO: So I can't answer that question. I don't want to get out in front of the President on this. But there are a whole series of actions that we're asking Turkey to do. They are a NATO partner. We need them to participate in the enforcement of the norms that NATO has put forward with its mission statement, and we've asked Turkey to do that in every dimension. And we're very – we're disappointed in their behavior to date, but we're hopeful that over time, they'll begin to do things that make more sense not only for the Middle East, but for the world. They have the capacity for good.

It's a big country that sits at the fulcrum between the Middle East and Europe, and we are applying every element of our diplomatic capacity to convince Turkey that being part of the West is the future for the Turkish people.

DR MAKOVSKY: The President has made, correctly, a big issue out of the fact of the American pastor Andrew Brunson being imprisoned for two years on patently false charges. His next court hearing is in two days.

SECRETARY POMPEO: In about 30 hours, yes.

DR MAKOVSKY: Yeah, is on – his next court hearing is on – in two days on October 12th. How would his release affect, do you think, overall U.S.-Turkey relations?

SECRETARY POMPEO: It's an important step, but make no mistake about it, they shouldn't have held him for all of this time. But look, it's a good thing, it's the right thing for them to do, it's the humanitarian thing for Turkey to do, and I'm very hopeful that before too long, Pastor Brunson will – he and his wife will be able to return to the United States. President Trump has had a focus on it, the administration's had a focus on it, and we're very hopeful that we'll see a good outcome before too long.

DR MAKOVSKY: Thank you. My last question is about the Palestinian Authority. Now, as Senator Cotton mentioned also about the Taylor Force Act – and this is something that JINSA and our fellow, Sander Gerber in particular, particularly championed and focused on.

However, since the passage of Taylor Force earlier this year, the Palestinian Authority has not really altered its policies or laws in paying terrorists and families. And I had a – what do you think this says about the Palestinian Authority? Do you consider it an entity that sponsors terror, for instance? What does it say about the prospects for peace and just generally about the U.S. approach to the Palestinians?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Well, I actually signed a memo today with respect to the Taylor Force Act denying \$165 million that would have been appropriated to the Palestinian Authority. (Applause.) That number is a rough estimate of the amount of money that was paid out on – for the various violations the Taylor Force Act was designed to enforce.

But you're right, the behavior has not changed materially, and this administration has taken, much as it did with the embassy, has taken a historic approach. It has said to the Palestinians we very much want you to have a space, you need to govern, you need to decide you want peace as well. We said the same thing to the Palestinians both in the West Bank and in the Gaza Strip. We've not rolled out our plan for the Middle East peace process yet, but we will before too terribly long, and we are hopeful that there will be parties on all sides that are prepared to engage in a constructive conversation that will lead to that.

We are very hopeful that one day the Palestinian people will have the same

kinds of things, the same material, the same opportunities that the people of Israel have, right? A real economy, a real governance, all the things that we want for every citizen of the world. And whether it's the Hamas leaders in the Gaza Strip or the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank, we've not been able to make that happen yet. But this administration has taken a fundamentally different view of how it is we can ultimately achieve that end objective.

DR MAKOVSKY: I just want to conclude. I know you've had a little busy travel schedule lately and I just want to thank you again and the whole administration for everything you've been doing, again, for U.S. national security and for the U.S.-Israel security relationship. We really appreciate it very much and thank you very much.

SECRETARY POMPEO: Thank you very much, Mike. Thank you all. (Applause.)

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