

Press Releases: Remarks at the Department of State's Foreign Affairs Day

Remarks
Mike Pompeo

Secretary of State

Dean Acheson Auditorium
Washington, DC
May 4, 2018

UNDER SECRETARY SHANNON: Ladies and gentlemen, welcome and good afternoon. It's a tremendous pleasure to see you all again. You've had a busy day, and I hope your discussions have been fruitful and have allowed you to engage on the many challenges and opportunities that face American diplomacy. Now you have an opportunity to meet and hear from our new Secretary of State, Mike Pompeo.

Secretary Pompeo is a great public servant, having served as an Army officer, a member of the House of Representatives, and until recently as director of the Central Intelligence Agency. He is a man of deep intellect, broad understanding of global issues, and strong character. He wasted no time getting started as Secretary of State, traveling directly from his confirmation and swearing-in to Brussels for the NATO ministerial, and then on to Saudi Arabia, Israel, and Jordan. He has returned in time for Foreign Affairs Day. (Laughter and applause.) And to meet with all of you.

So ladies and gentlemen, please join me in welcoming the 70th Secretary of State, Mike Pompeo. (Applause.)

SECRETARY POMPEO: Thank you. Thank you all very much. While I was standing there, I did the math. I count about 12,000 years of experience in the room. (Laughter.)

And I must say, it's an honor to be with you here today. It's the 53rd Foreign Affairs Day. I know I speak for everyone in the building when I say that we're grateful for your service to the country and the many sacrifices you and your families have made along the way.

President Eisenhower – I tend to use Kansas quotes – he's a Kansan I greatly admire – he once remarked that when State Department colleagues get together, it felt more like a "family gathering" than anything else. I have already found that description fits. I was given an incredibly warm welcome on my first day. The team has been great. My wife joked that she hoped that I wasn't peaking that day. (Laughter.) Always that risk. And it's still the case. As I was walking down the hall, I realized I still need help to find my way around the building.

I want to thank a few people for making today possible. Our generous co-sponsors, the American Foreign Service Association, DACOR, and the Senior Living Foundation of the American Foreign Service. Thank you for making this possible, and for your constant support of our team. (Applause.)

I also want to thank – congratulate, rather, some very special people. I want to congratulate the award recipients: DACOR's Foreign Service Cup winner Ambassador Henry Allen Holmes. (Applause.) Thank you, Ambassador, for serving our community both in and out of government, and to dedicating your life to equipping the next generation of our team's leaders. We are also proud today to recognize the winners of the Director General's Civil Service Cup and Foreign Service Cup – Richard Greene and Ambassador Kristie Kenney. (Applause.)

You have all had a long day, but this day does offer a real opportunity, an opportunity to review – to consider our successes from the past in a building of strong – and in how we've built a strong, diverse corps of the best foreign affairs professionals in the world. But it also provides an opportunity to consider the future, and in my first week on the job it's mostly future, not past. There are many challenges we face today; you all know that. And while I'm new to this, and it is my first week, I want to talk to you about where I believe we're going, and my commitment to you and our

Foreign and Civil Service team.

But for starters, the good news is while I have not been here long, I already know the mettle, patriotism, and the nature and character and the dedication of you and your colleagues. I remember trips I took as a member of Congress where I watched Foreign Service officers putting their lives on hold at all hours of the day and night, working weekends to help us get the most out of our visit. And I know they were working when we were gone, as well.

One thing I learned right away is that the department's heroes regularly toil outside of the limelight, in tough environments all over the world. So well before I raised my right hand and took the Oath of Office, the State Department had already served me incredibly well. And it is indeed an enormous honor to now be part of this group.

These times are turbulent. The demands are for strong leadership. It is essential that our team does that and counters the threats that we face with courage and strength. I know that you all did that; I know that our team will do that in the days ahead.

Fortunately, we have a President who believes in muscular diplomacy as well, one that makes full use of the instruments of national power to advance, first and foremost, vital American interests and values.

Effective, forward-thinking diplomacy increases our chances of solving problems peacefully, without ever firing a shot.

Our foreign policy, too, it's got to be pragmatic while still remaining principled – and agile enough to respond to changing circumstances yet anchored in the fundamental ideals and values that ground – ground our nation's history. I saw our country's strength and commitment to those ideals as a young cavalry officer. Tom referred to my time in the military. I led troops that patrolled the boundary between freedom and communism along the East German – then-East German and Czechoslovakian border. Today the world strength – the world needs that strength and those ideals ever more.

We have to continue this centuries-old mission of defending freedom, liberty, and human dignity around the world, while first keeping our country and people safe.

At that time, I recall we were prepared for conflict along the Iron Curtain, but it was diplomacy executed over months and years and, indeed, decades that saved me and my tank platoon from ever having to engage.

This is every corner of the world today. Men and women of the State Department and USAID out there serving America's interests. It's essential to deal with the many challenges. My mission is to help every member of our team achieve that goal.

Today there are several places – you've heard about some of them – there's enormous diplomatic effort to continue to keep the pressure on North Korea and bring them to the negotiating table, to a place where we can successfully eliminate the threat from Kim Jong-un's nuclear arsenal.

We see it, too, with our allies in Europe. I spent my first few days there – indeed, my first hours. We're blessed to have so many allies with strong relationships. There are, of course, rough times and places that we disagree. But these countries share our values and our interests, and we all have a common effort in ensuring prosperity for our nations moving forward.

I traveled from there to the Middle East. We need strong diplomatic efforts there as well to prevent Iran's destabilizing behavior in Syria, in Yemen, and across the region. We have to tackle the threat from jihadist terror and from places with really weak governance. These are all great challenges, but I'm confident that our team can develop strategies and diplomatic footprints capable of resolving them.

We often don't talk so much about Latin America, but as we witness the destruction of a once prosperous and democratic nation in our near-abroad, we need to tackle that diplomatically as well. A dictator today in Venezuela cripples his economy and starves his people. We need a strong State Department and USAID to help the millions of Venezuelans fleeing the corrupt regime as a result of this entirely man-made crisis.

And finally, we need our diplomats and foreign affairs professionals working all over the world to promote the dignity of every single human being to live freely and achieve their full potential.

A lot's changed in the 53 years since the first time this ceremony was held. But I am confident that one thing that has never faltered is the character of the people who deliver American diplomacy. The men and women of this department and the agencies represented have always been called upon to do great things. Great things that still resonate throughout these walls and throughout the history of our great country. This team responded to the Iranian revolution in 1979; and organized an important summit in Reykjavik in 1986; we built a coalition of partners during the first Gulf War; and I've already talked about the reunification of Germany, assisting a newly free Central and Eastern Europe in the wake of it. There's more history to be made. I'm confident of that. And it will be because of the hardworking men and women that I have been chosen to lead.

I want to thank everyone here today for helping write that history. This is a remarkable institution. I've seen a handful of our officers in this first week. I can tell you that you have prepared them well. Over the course of the weeks and months, I'd welcome thoughts from you, ideas, your expertise, and I know that together we can achieve great things for our nation.

Today is also special because we get a chance to remember and honor the sacrifice of Americans living and working abroad on behalf of the United States.

Following my remarks, it will be a privilege to take part in a memorial ceremony to honor those who lost their lives in service to our country. In particular, we will honor the service of one man and one woman who made the ultimate sacrifice while honorably serving America abroad. Our nation owes them and their families an enormous debt of gratitude. Let's remember them

and the great sacrifice our team makes every day to advance America's interests and protect our nation.

It has been a great pleasure to host the reunion my first week on the job. I cannot imagine a better start to my time in service. Thank you for your service, and please do not be strangers. Thank you and God bless you. (Applause.)

The Office of Website Management, Bureau of Public Affairs, manages this site as a portal for information from the U.S. State Department. External links to other Internet sites should not be construed as an endorsement of the views or privacy policies contained therein.