

Press Releases: Remarks With Paraguayan Foreign Minister Luis Castiglioni at a Press Availability

Remarks

Michael R. Pompeo

Secretary of State

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FOREIGN MINISTER CASTIGLIONI: (Via interpreter) Good morning to all the members of the media. Again, we give our cordial and special greetings and a welcome to the press and to Mr. Michael Pompeo, Secretary of State of the Government of the United States of America. It is a great honor, it is a great pleasure, to receive Mr. Secretary of State in the Republic of Paraguay.

Last night when I received him, when I greeted him – the Secretary of State, I told him that he was going to be a part of history of Paraguay, because after half a century as Secretary of State of the United States of the Government of the U.S. had returned to a friend, a country, a friendly country, an ally of Paraguay, and then in – on behalf of Secretary Michael Pompeo we're going to be – his name will be set in history as the second Secretary of State who visited Paraguay after more than half a century.

We have had with Mr. Mario Abdo Benitez, President of Paraguay, a very – an excellent meeting with the Secretary Michael Pompeo and his staff in which we have faced several subjects, all of them of interest, bilateral interest, and also we have dealt with other subjects of multilateral interest.

Firstly, I want to highlight that Paraguay for over 30 years has decided to take the road of consolidation of public freedoms, on the road of democracy, and on the road of the absolute respect of human rights here in our country, and also to help the strengthening of these values anywhere in the world. The commitment of Paraguay is in Paraguay, but it is also a commitment of Paraguay to defend democracy, public freedoms, human rights, will be beyond our borders. It will be in the region, in the hemisphere, and in the whole world.

For that reason, President Mario Abdo and I have spoken with Mr. Secretary of State that our position in the case of Venezuela is a position founded in principle and values and has – that has made that from the very beginning the Government of the U.S. and the Government of Paraguay have really tread together in this road, because both governments are committed to help so that the people of Venezuela recover its – their fundamental rights, recover the democracy, recover the freedoms, and that the human rights be respected, observed.

Paraguay and the U.S., we will walk together so that this humanitarian tragedy that the millions of Venezuelans who are surviving, eking out a life in pain, will live again in liberty, in freedom and democracy, and recovering their consecrated rights. The position of Paraguay is very firm in this Venezuela subject, and it is still strong and firm with the U.S., together with the U.S. We have said always with dictators, with tyrants, we do not dialogue. Tyrants and dictators are combatted, are fought against. We have to combat them in order to recover the basic liberties of the Venezuelan people so they can live with dignity again, once again.

At the same time, we have spoken with the Secretary of State on the commitment that is absolutely firm and unconditional that Paraguay has to fight transnational crime in all its areas, in all its facets. Paraguay has declared a war without quarters, without asking for quarters to international crime, to drug trafficking, to arms dealing, to contraband, to the laundering of assets and money. In this combat, in this battle, it's a battle that has no point of return. We will have to vanquish, and we have assured that the Secretary of State.

Paraguay in that sense will want to cooperate closely with the Government of the United States because we tread the very same road, and the Secretary of State has told us that he recognized our enormous effort and struggle and that they are here to cooperate, so that both countries, the U.S. and Paraguay together, jointly with other friendly brother countries – Brazil, Argentina – could establish a positive alliance to fight transnational crime and obtain the victory that our people deserve.

At the same time, we are – we have decided to have a permanent interaction between both governments, between both secretaries – in my case, Secretary Pompeo and myself – so that this cooperation be permanent. This cooperation not only be point by point, but it is also be transported into time and to really go beyond the administration. The friendship and alliance of Paraguay go over a century, and the friendship and alliance of Paraguay will extend for another century and other centuries because we have ideals and principles and values that are common to all of us. We are sure that with the visit of the Secretary of State we begin. There is an inflection point. We always had a very positive relations. But with your visit, Mr. Secretary, there is a point, a departing point, and the tendency of our relation will be much more useful and positive.

The Secretary of State has brought the greetings of President Trump to President Abdo, and we are convinced that not long from now President Abdo will be greeting personally again President Trump in Washington. We have two

governments, two people, that have the same principles, the same values, the same ideals. For that reason, they should cooperate and they should work together.

Also, President Abdo has manifested the Secretary of State of the great interest that we have in Paraguay to strengthen our relations commercially, the trade area. Economic trade relations that will help to get us closer not only of our business sectors but also getting closer our peoples, because those who will benefit will be the peoples of Paraguay and the U.S.

For that reason, we have put a lot of faith that in the next few months, working together, we will make it possible that we will have more investment for business people from the U.S. and Paraguay so that the trade that will benefit both parties, so that we will have in a short time the opening of the market of the U.S. to Paraguayan beef, the best beef in the world right now, Mr. Secretary. We are number one. Despite what you were told, at this point, our beef is the best in the world. That beef should be also enjoyed in the U.S. and every one of the States, and that will be possible in a short period of time with this relation that we are developing.

Finally, I want to remark to (inaudible) to Mr. Pompeo and to President Trump, who have taken the decision of coming to Latin America, to come to this part of the world, to come to talk to their friends and to their natural allies. And I am convinced that this decision that you have made and this concrete action shall be recognized by us, and also in the same sense we commit ourselves to strengthen a lot more, a lot more our relations, our cooperation, and at the same time sharing ideals, values, principles to go fighting and vanquishing transnational crime, making the region more safe and secure, and so that the flag of freedom will be really prevailing in the region, in the hemisphere, and everywhere in the world. Thank you.

MODERATOR: (Via interpreter) Next, the words of Secretary of State of the U.S., Mr. Mike Pompeo.

SECRETARY POMPEO: Thank you. Thank you, President Abdo Benitez and Foreign Minister Castiglioni, for hosting me. Thank you, too, to the people of Paraguay. It is wonderful to be here. It has been too long for sure, and my commitment is it will not be another five decades before another American Secretary of State returns. Our friendship is too important. The amazing people of Paraguay are too important.

Please recognize too that my visit is part of this administration's effort, as the foreign minister described, to re-engage with our good friends, with our partners from this – in this hemisphere, from the Arctic Circle to Tierra del Fuego. We are re-engaging in ways that America has not.

I spoke yesterday in Santiago about why we're making this push, because we see an opportunity to partner with true democracies. They share our values, they share our goals, and they share our aspirations. We see Paraguay as just such a partner. Look no further than the current crisis in Venezuela to see our teamwork in action. Together, we are working to restore stability and democracy from the chaos caused by Maduro.

As a member of the Lima Group, Paraguay stands among the leaders in our hemisphere in defense of democracy, in calling out Maduro for what he truly is – a power-hungry tyrant who has brought ruin to his country and to his people. This is not just the view of the United States nor just the view of Paraguay. It's the consensus of 54 nations worldwide that have banded together in recognition that the constitutional authority of the Venezuelan National Assembly and Interim President Guaido are proper.

One important aspect of the U.S.-Paraguayan relationship I want to highlight: It's the work that we're doing together to weed out corruption and fight transnational crime. As President Abdo Benitez put it well, "Caiga quien caiga," – the law applies to all. The USAID programs are helping train the next generation of Paraguayan lawyers and judges. Through the efforts of Senabico, illegal-gotten gains now serve the people of Paraguay instead of its criminals. The United States Department of State as well is helping Paraguay do this by assisting with a new Office of Asset Forfeiture.

Along with each of these specific efforts, President Benitez and I also discussed international criminal organizations that are abusing the sovereignty of Paraguay and its neighbors in the tri-border area. We are diligent. The United States is diligent in lending a hand in this fight. Our Treasury, the United States Treasury, has sanctioned a number of individuals, front companies, and other tri-border area-based entities tied to Hizballah.

We've led workshops on investigating and prosecuting complex terrorist financial organizations and schemes, and as a result – as a result – Hizballah-linked individuals from the tri-border area have been arrested and extradited.

Importantly, the economic ties between our two countries are strong and, importantly, growing, largely because of the success that you have had in growing your own economy. Growth has averaged 4 percent for much of the last decade and a half, outpacing the rates of many of Paraguay's regional neighbors. Poverty is significantly reduced all across the country, and the middle class has almost doubled since the year 2003. You should be very proud of that.

Paraguay's rise has clear benefits for the United States of America. Our national two-way trade in goods totaled 2.5 billion in 2018. Paraguay exported \$131 million in goods to the United States just last year alone. And the United States is the number-one source for foreign direct investment here in Paraguay.

I would urge – rather, continue to urge – in the future to ensure inbound foreign investment is sustainable, transparent, and works for the benefit of the people of Paraguay. As I said in my speech yesterday, the United States urges caution about predatory practices from countries like China. We welcome Paraguay's warm relations with Taiwan through strong cooperation and agriculture, education, and commerce.

Just as important as our economic ties are the connections between our two people. I think it's a great note to end on. There are no people to better

represent these connections than the nearly 2,000 students, 600 teachers, and 1,800 volunteers who have participated in exchanges with my home state of Kansas back in the United States. The Kansas-Paraguay Partnership celebrated its 50th anniversary last year, and I am delighted to hear that President Abdo Benitez' own family includes a Kansas State Wildcat and a future Pittsburgh State Gorilla.

As these ties suggest, our nations have a lot in common. The United States and Paraguay have experiences and will continue to share even more of them. And on behalf of President Trump, I want to congratulate Paraguay on its transformation to a truly thriving democracy. We look forward to building on our strong, strong bilateral relationship, as the construction of our new embassy compound here quite clearly symbolizes.

Thank you, Mr. Foreign Minister, for having me here with you today.

MODERATOR: Ladies and gentlemen (inaudible).

QUESTION: Thank you very much, gentlemen. Mr. Secretary – can you hear me? North Korean leader Kim Jong-un said in a speech yesterday that the breakdown in talks with the United States has raised the risk of reviving tensions. He also said the U.S. has until the end of the year to agree on another summit but not if it's like Hanoi, where he said the U.S. came to the table with unrealized plans. President Trump, as I'm sure you saw, tweeted this morning that his personal relationship with Kim is excellent and he thought a third summit would be good now that we, quote, "fully know where each other stands."

My question is: Is that accurate? Do we have a better understanding of the North Korean position now than we did in Hanoi? If so, what do we know now that we didn't previously? Will the U.S. change its approach, and are there current talks for a third summit?

And sir, Mr. Foreign Minister, you've taken a very strong stance against Maduro in support of Interim President Juan Guaido. You just said that with tyrants we do not dialogue, they are fought against. And my question is: If Maduro continues to refuse to leave office, would you support military intervention either by regional or international powers?

Thank you both very much.

SECRETARY POMPEO: So with respect to our negotiations with North Korea, I don't have anything to add other than even after Hanoi we have continued to have conversations. I am confident that what we did in Hanoi put us in a better place to continue to move forward. Chairman Kim made a commitment. He made the commitment to me personally no fewer than half a dozen times and to President Trump that he wanted to denuclearize. We have work to do, but I am confident we'll continue to make progress.

FOREIGN MINISTER CASTIGLIONI: (Via interpreter) We are convinced that all the diplomatic effort to isolate that regime will have results in a short time. We know that everything we are doing together with the Government of the U.S.

and other countries of the whole world, more than 50 countries, and they're going to be adding more and more countries, it's going to have concrete results, and these results will be seen from the reaction of the people of Venezuela, of the very armed forces of Venezuela's. It's going to be the Venezuelans themselves who will change the situation of their country, and it's going to be the very Venezuelan who will be really liberate their country from tyranny, from tyranny, with the cooperation and help of the U.S., of Paraguay, and all the other countries in the world. Thank you.

MODERATOR: (Via interpreter) The second question, the response? To Ruth DiGiovanni of ABC TV.

QUESTION: (Via interpreter) Good morning, Mr. Secretary. We have spoken of the tri-border area that is spoken by President Abdo. What perception do you have about the antiterrorism situation and the money laundering in the tri-border area? And you have also spoken of investment, and if the U.S. has intention of investment in the energy area, soon Paraguay will negotiate the Treaty of Itaipu and the last time the Secretary of State came they really – and they had some link with the subject of signing the treaty for Itaipu.

SECRETARY POMPEO: To your first question, I think real progress has been made on money laundering, the transnational criminal organizations, but that there remains a great deal of work to do. We talked about the ability of the 3+1 to begin to continue to build out capacity, because the will is there. Everyone understands that for the Paraguayan people, it's an imperative that we take down these transnational criminal organizations. And so we'll use – the U.S. will certainly be there to continue to support this effort. And while I think there has been real progress and this government has been determined and very forthright about the need to get this right and has taken real steps to do so, there's more work to be done. The United States stands strongly with helping Paraguay in being successful in that endeavor.

And I hope – as for investment here, one of the reasons for my trip was to demonstrate to American companies that this is a great place, a great partner, a great democracy, not just in the energy field but in all other fields. I hope that foreign direct investment here in Paraguay will continue to grow.

MODERATOR: (Via interpreter) Ladies and gentlemen, this conference has come to an end.

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