

Press Releases: Interview With Steve Inskeep of NPR

Interview
Michael R. Pompeo

Secretary of State

Washington, DC
December 21, 2018

QUESTION: Thanks very much for taking the time.

SECRETARY POMPEO: You bet, Steve.

QUESTION: Is ISIS defeated?

SECRETARY POMPEO: We've made the caliphate in Syria go away. We remember, you remember this, Steve. You remember cells with people in them being burned. The President made an enormous commitment to take down the caliphate and that has been achieved. We now have the battle that is a longtime battle, which is the counterterrorism battle not only against ISIS but against al-Qaida and others, HTS – all the terrorist groups. President Trump remains just as committed today as he was yesterday and the day before, and the progress that the Trump administration has made in defeating ISIS in Syria is extraordinary and we're very proud of that accomplishment.

QUESTION: When U.S. troops leave eastern Syria, of course, U.S. allies – Kurdish groups – will remain in eastern Syria. What obligations does the United States have to its Kurdish allies?

SECRETARY POMPEO: We're at the State Department. We've been working diligently for a long time, including the entirety of my time in service here, to achieve the UN process led by Staffan de Mistura and now by his successor to get a political outcome in Syria that takes down the threat – the threat of violence, that attempts to create the conditions for what is now over 6 million displaced persons, some of them internal to Syria, some of them in Lebanon, Jordan, and Turkey. We are committed to that. Ambassador Jeffrey is hard at work trying to implement –

QUESTION: Jim Jeffrey, the envoy for Syria.

SECRETARY POMPEO: The special envoy for Syria is today hard at work trying to deliver against the UN commitments. We're counting on the Russians, we're

counting on the Turks, we're counting on each of those parties to honor their commitments to these – this UN Security Council resolution, and the United States will continue to lead those diplomat efforts.

QUESTION: Well, let's talk about the Russians and the Turks. The Turks, who, of course, have been hostile to the Kurds, have already said they're preparing to move into eastern Syria. The Russians have –

SECRETARY POMPEO: A lot of history, Steve. You shouldn't enter that debate today. (Laughter.) The history between the Turks – the history between the Turks and the –

QUESTION: Would you warn the Turks against attacking –

SECRETARY POMPEO: Just – we have to – there's a lot history, Steve. Some folks want to just talk about what happened this morning. The history between the Turks and the Kurdish is a long one, it is a complicated one, and the United States is deeply aware of the set of relationships there, and we have a very clear mission set. Our mission set in Syria was the defeat of the ISIS caliphate. We continue to push back against ISIS in West Africa, in Afghanistan, all across the world. That threat certainly is out there. The President has acknowledged that. He has also acknowledged the administration's continued commitment to that defeat, something that the previous administration could not accomplish.

QUESTION: But I'm asking you about something a little different here. The Russian foreign ministry has said in the last day that the withdrawal of U.S. troops creates good prospects for a peaceful solution, and they gave the example of Aleppo, where the Syrian government backed by Russia went in, destroyed U.S. allies, and took over. Would you warn the Syrian government against moving against the Kurdish allies that you're leaving behind?

SECRETARY POMPEO: I don't give much credit to the Russian statements on much of anything, to be honest with you, Steve. Here's what I know: The United States made a commitment. We led a global Defeat ISIS campaign to take down the caliphate in Syria. We have achieved that. The effort that – I've spoken to European counterparts, Middle Eastern counterparts over the last week to 10 days. This effort, this Defeat ISIS coalition, remains, and we are clear-eyed about the risks to the United States from terrorism and we will yield to no one in our efforts to defeat it.

QUESTION: On terrorism, no commitment to U.S. allies left behind in Syria, then?

SECRETARY POMPEO: We always have commitments to our allies. We've done this relentlessly. You all have reported differently, Steve. I get it. I get the game. But you all report this differently. Our – the American commitment to our allies, not just in this situation but all across the world – you report that America is withdrawing from the world when, in fact, just the opposite has taken place. President Trump and our State Department has led a global American leadership campaign that is unrivaled. We're incredibly proud of it. Our allies see that. We stare at things that don't work anymore and we demand

that they begin to work. This is not only in the best interests of America but our allies as well, Steve.

QUESTION: I'll just mention – I know time is short, but we can set aside – if there's a specific NPR story you ever think is wrong, let us know.

SECRETARY POMPEO: Believe me, I assure you I'll do that.

QUESTION: Let me ask about another subject. Has North Korea's Kim Jong-un let you down?

SECRETARY POMPEO: We've known from the very first trip that I took when I was in a previous role that the challenge of denuclearizing North Korea was not one that would be something that would be easy or without bumps in the road or would occur in a way that was like instant pudding. The world doesn't quite work that way.

We have diplomatically, relentlessly worked to support the President's mission statement, which is to denuclearize North Korea. We got the commitment from Chairman Kim. We've made some progress. There remains a long ways to go, but we are hard at even today.

QUESTION: But they haven't agreed to give an accounting of their nuclear weapons, which is something you wanted, and as time passes they're beginning to get concessions. North and South Korea are talking about reopening roads and railroads. The United States is working to loosen travel restrictions. North Korea is getting benefits without giving things up.

SECRETARY POMPEO: The North Koreans have not suffered an economic sanctions regime like the one that the Trump administration has imposed and continues to impose ever.

QUESTION: Will –

SECRETARY POMPEO: Ever, Steve. I mean, you say things and they're just unfounded, Steve. You say we're going to loosen travel restrictions when, if you read the statement very clearly, we're working to make sure that humanitarian assistance can be delivered.

QUESTION: It is a narrow –

SECRETARY POMPEO: It is right – it's in the statement, Steve. Don't read half of it. Read it all.

QUESTION: I read it all.

SECRETARY POMPEO: It's important because this has deep connotations. You're suggesting to your listeners that somehow we're relaxing the economic sanctions campaign. Nothing could be further from the truth. The truth of the matter is that we are very consistent with what we've done before, making sure that where there is real need, real humanitarian need there, that we don't deny that to the people of North Korea. And sometimes it takes getting an American to be able to travel in there to achieve that, and where that's

the case we want to facilitate that.

QUESTION: I think it is fair to say they, however, have been evasive. They've been canceling meetings with your diplomats. Has Kim Jong-un let you down?

SECRETARY POMPEO: It's been a great process. They're not firing rockets. They're not conducting nuclear tests. We have a ways to go, and we will continue to achieve – to work to achieve the President's agenda.

QUESTION: The second summit's going to happen?

SECRETARY POMPEO: I'm counting on it.

QUESTION: Okay, let me ask about another thing briefly because I know this is something where you're making an announcement as we're speaking, having to do with the way that asylum seekers will be treated.

SECRETARY POMPEO: Yes, sir.

QUESTION: They'll be kept south of the U.S. border while they apply for asylum, which is something the administration has been working toward. There's a related matter that you commented on the other day. You said ideally you would cut off the flow of asylum seekers, they would not be coming out of Central America. What is the U.S. government doing to improve conditions in Central America, if anything, so that there are fewer people heading north?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Yeah. So the program that you spoke about that Secretary Nielsen and I are announcing this morning is a fundamental shift. It's consistent with U.S. law, and more importantly it is deeply consistent with the protection, the humanitarian protection, of these migrants as they transit their way through Mexico. We will no longer permit those who are seeking asylum to remain inside the United States during the pendency of their immigration process. They'll file a claim and then they will be returned to Mexico. The Mexican government will be – has or shortly will be issuing a statement talking about how they will ensure that those migrants are protected and that they'll get access to counsel, visas if they need them. This is both deeply lawful and deeply humanitarian.

With respect to reducing the flow, we think this will help. We think this will disincentivize folks who think that if they can make the transit through Mexico – a very difficult and arduous journey where terrible things often happen to these migrants – we think they will realize that they won't be able to stay in the United States and disappear into our country, something that we do think creates an incentive for them to come here. So we think this alone will greatly reduce the migration flows.

And then we made an announcement on Tuesday about efforts that we'll make, commitments, financial commitments for good projects that we hope will lead to conditions where fewer folks will want to leave Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, and make this arduous journey.

QUESTION: And that's in the U.S. interest to invest in Central America?

SECRETARY POMPEO: We always know it's in the best interests of the world for people who are in difficult conditions to have better economic outcomes. We hope American business will travel there and create opportunities for these people who are in difficult conditions in those countries.

QUESTION: What would you say, Mr. Secretary, to officials in China, or North Korea, or Iran, for that matter, who may feel that they should try to outwait the Trump administration, that the President will not be here forever, that he's been politically weakened lately?

SECRETARY POMPEO: I don't talk about politics. I'm hoping I get to be the Secretary of State for six more years.

QUESTION: I hear the hope. I hear the hope. Okay, Mr. Secretary, thanks so much.

SECRETARY POMPEO: Great. Thank you very much, Steve.

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[Press Releases: Secretary Pompeo's Call With Iraqi President Barham Salih](#)

Readout
Office of the Spokesperson

Washington, DC
December 21, 2018

The below is attributable to Deputy Spokesperson Robert Palladino:

Secretary of State Michael R. Pompeo spoke today with Iraqi President Barham Salih. Secretary Pompeo discussed the recent territorial defeat of ISIS in Syria with President Salih and reaffirmed U.S. support for Iraq as it

continues to fight ISIS remnants and builds a more stable, prosperous future. The Secretary also stressed the importance of our long-term bilateral partnership, anchored by the U.S.-Iraq Strategic Framework Agreement, and the necessity of supporting Iraq's economic development and independence.

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[Press Releases: Secretary Pompeo's Call With Iraqi Prime Minister Adil Abd al-Mahdi](#)

Readout
Office of the Spokesperson

Washington, DC
December 21, 2018

The below is attributable to Deputy Spokesperson Robert Palladino:

Secretary of State Michael R. Pompeo spoke today with Iraqi Prime Minister Adil Abd al-Mahdi. The Secretary discussed the recent territorial defeat of ISIS in Syria and underlined U.S. commitment to Iraq's sovereignty and territorial integrity noting the Coalition will continue to work closely with Iraqi Security Forces to defeat ISIS remnants. The Secretary also reiterated his support for the continuation and deepening of the long-standing U.S.-Iraq partnership, as articulated in the Strategic Framework Agreement.

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[Press Releases: Interview With Brian Grimmert of KMWU Wichita Public Radio](#)

Interview

Michael R. Pompeo

Secretary of State

Via Teleconference

December 20, 2018

QUESTION: Good morning, Secretary. How are you?

SECRETARY POMPEO: I'm very good.

QUESTION: I'll just jump right in, since our time is limited.

SECRETARY POMPEO: Yes, sir.

QUESTION: My first question is kind of a two-part question. And the first part of it is, what is it – from your perspective as Secretary of State and what you do working with other countries' leaders, what is kind of the goal of the tariffs with China? And is achieving that goal worth the cost to farmers and manufacturers here in the United States?

SECRETARY POMPEO: So the President's mission with respect to trade in China is very, very clear. I saw this when I ran a small business in Kansas. The trade relationship with China is fundamentally unfair. They charge huge tariffs for the products that we try and sell there; they steal our intellectual property when we move our businesses there. That is unacceptable. It hurts Kansas workers.

And so the President's mission in his dealings with China on trade is to create a fair and reciprocal relationship. If they would get rid of their tariffs and they would stop stealing our intellectual property and – those are the simple things he's asking for. It's only fair to Kansas workers to do that, and it's the mission set that the President's engaged in with the tariffs. It is – his aim is to create a fair and reciprocal trade

relationship so that American workers can produce products and sell them on an equal footing into the Chinese market, in the same way China has been able to do in the United States for decades.

QUESTION: Do you believe that you're making headwind in that area – or headway, sorry, not headwind. Do you believe that you're making some movement there in trying to prevent some of that intellectual property theft through the use of these tariffs?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Yes, but it's difficult. The Chinese have this as a method which they have used with great intent over the years. And they're – they don't want to give that up easily, and so it is a real challenge. It takes hard-fought negotiating, hard-fought diplomacy, hard-fought trade and discussions with Department of Treasury in the United States. But we are determined to do this.

It is fundamentally unfair to allow the United States to continue to have the Chinese have forced technology transfer, force American companies who want to operate in China to behave in ways that are inconsistent with their own workers' best interest. And President Trump is the first president in an awfully long time to take this threat to American workers, Kansas farmers seriously.

QUESTION: Moving away a little bit from the trade issues, what would you have to say to some of the U.S. allies who are upset or surprised by President Trump's announcement that he's removing ground troops from Syria?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Oh, goodness. The U.S. efforts under President Trump in Syria have had extraordinary success. We've taken away more than 90 percent of the ISIS caliphate. You'll remember, they were holding people in cages and lighting them on fire. We've eliminated over 90 percent of the actual real estate the caliphate held. We've had a very successful effort there. We will continue to keep the homeland safe from the threat from ISIS.

But it no longer makes sense for there to be 2,000 soldiers stationed there. We can accomplish this mission in a different way. And the President's made a decision to do that. Our allies know the United States will always be the world's leader in fighting against terrorism around the world. We've done it for decades, and we will continue to be alongside them, making sure that not only is America safe, but the threat from terrorism around the world is diminished.

QUESTION: Just lastly, because our time is running short, what are the next steps in talks or plans for talks with North Korea? And do you think that they are living up to some of the agreements that President Trump made the last time that he met with Kim Jong-un?

SECRETARY POMPEO: So I never talk about the actual discussions we're having, because they're private conversations on how to work our pathway forward toward the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula. We're very hopeful that we can make a significant step. The next public objective is that Chairman Kim and President Trump have both indicated that they want to have a summit,

and I am hopeful that not too long after the first of the year we can get the two of them together and make another substantial step along the way towards creating a reduced threat to the United States from North Korea's nuclear weapons arsenal.

QUESTION: Excellent. Thank you so much for your time. And I know you're extremely busy, and I appreciate you giving me a moment.

SECRETARY POMPEO: Thank you very much, sir. You have a great day and a Merry Christmas.

QUESTION: You too. Thank you.

SECRETARY POMPEO: You bet. So long.

QUESTION: Bye-bye.

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[Press Releases: Interview With Bryce Dolan of 550 KFRM-AM](#)

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Secretary of State

Via Teleconference
December 20, 2018

QUESTION: (Inaudible.)

SECRETARY POMPEO: Sure. So the President's decision to withdraw the couple thousand folks that we've had in Syria is based on the fact that the effort

there to crush the caliphate, the ISIS caliphate in the region, is now near completion. We had remarkable success: over 90-plus percent of the real estate that ISIS owned in which they attacked people in the West from that place is gone. We've achieved that mission and now it's time to make sure that we continue to fight ISIS – they exist not only in Syria but around the world – but do so in a way that reduces the risk to American soldiers. The President made that decision and we will, in an orderly way, make a transition so that we can continue to keep Americans safe without expending as much blood and treasure of the American people in Syria.

QUESTION: So with that being said, Mr. Secretary, as I alluded to, Fort Riley, the Big Red One, is sending soldiers to Afghanistan in February. What is the status of the relations in the Middle East right now?

SECRETARY POMPEO: So our – the Middle East continues to be a place where terror emanates. We have to make sure that we do everything we can to prevent that terror from reaching our homeland, from attacking Americans certainly in the United States but Americans that travel around the world. We've watched Iran be the world's largest state sponsor of terror from that region, and this administration has begun a massive campaign to put pressure on the Islamic Republic of Iran to stop that terror. We've done so by building out coalitions with our partners in the Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, all around the Middle East, our Israeli partners, to do just that – to create stability in the Middle East and prevent terror attacks on our homeland.

QUESTION: So switching topics here, Mr. Secretary, leading up to ongoing trade negotiations. How would you explain China's attitude towards the United States?

SECRETARY POMPEO: China has had for a long time before this administration an incredibly unfair trade relationship with our country. I saw that when I was a member of Congress from Kansas. Farmers who tried to sell their products into China, our aviation builders, our manufacturers all across the state couldn't get a fair shake. There weren't reciprocal, fair arrangements between the United States and China. President Trump is aiming to fix that. The negotiations that are underway are very much aimed at that. And what the President asks for is simply this: He wants fairness and reciprocity. If the Chinese can sell their products here, we ought to be able to take American products built by American workers and send them to China and serve their customers as well.

I hope we can get that done in the next few months, but the President is determined to achieve that outcome on behalf of the American worker.

QUESTION: And with that being said, after entering into a new trade agreement with Canada and Mexico, the USMCA, please explain the relationship between the two countries moving forward.

SECRETARY POMPEO: It's good I've had a chance to actually meet the incoming – or now the current – president of Mexico. I work closely with my counterpart there. I work closely with my counterpart in Canada. We now have the USMCA, which we believe will, again, be much more fair to American workers and

create a North American trading system that will be the envy of the world. It'll be good for workers all across America, including those in Kansas.

QUESTION: Secretary, I know we don't have a lot of time and we could really spend hours talking about each of these questions. But as briefly as you could, could you explain the status of U.S.-Russia relations?

SECRETARY POMPEO: So it's been a real challenge during our time. President Trump very much understands that this is a nuclear-armed state and to the extent we can find places where we can cooperate and work together, that benefits America. But they have proven not to be reliable partners across almost every front. What they did in Ukraine, the actions they took against our elections – all of these things create risk for the American people and President Trump has been very strong in communicating to the Russians that this kind of behavior is simply unacceptable and we've done all that we can to deter it.

QUESTION: Just one more question, Mr. Secretary. From representing Kansas to leading the nation's highest intelligence agency, and now coming up on a year as our country's top foreign diplomat, how has your experience in Kansas influenced your work in foreign relations?

SECRETARY POMPEO: I think about home a lot. I think about Kansas all the time as I travel the world. The people that I knew there shaped me. When I ran a small business there, I came to understand how important it is to make sure American workers have opportunity to sell their products around the world. Everything about my life in Kansas shapes what I do every day. It's an incredible privilege to be America's most senior diplomat and serve President Trump, and Kansas certainly is sitting there when I'm with the President, well represented.

QUESTION: All right, Mr. Secretary, we are outside our five-minute window. I appreciate you taking the time to speak with us. Are you okay with everything that I asked and everything that was said?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Yes, sir. It's all good.

QUESTION: Well, it was much appreciated, Mr. Secretary. And you have a great Christmas.

SECRETARY POMPEO: Thank you. Merry Christmas to you too. So long, sir.

QUESTION: Thank you. Bye.

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