

Press Releases: Interview With Andrew West of ABC Radio Australia

Interview
Michael R. Pompeo

Secretary of State

Via Telephone
July 19, 2018

QUESTION: Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, welcome to the ABC. Thank you for your time.

SECRETARY POMPEO: Great. It's good to be with you this morning, Andrew.

QUESTION: Yes. You are holding a ministerial summit, and I want to ask you about some of the challenges to religious freedom that your own department has identified. Your administration has reached out to North Korea. Your own department has identified shocking violations of religious freedom there. Will any further rapprochement with North Korea depend on North Korea opening up to religious freedom and human rights?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Well, thanks for the question. We have a first-ever religious freedom ministerial here at the State Department. We're going to have over 80 delegations from all across the world, 40 at the foreign minister level. Religious freedom is something that's very important to me personally; it's very important to President Trump. And the State Department is going to lead the world in opening up religious freedom to every citizen. That would certainly include places like North Korea. Well, that will be a real priority for our administration as well. We believe every human being ought to have the right to worship in the way that they prefer, or to choose not to if that's their preference as well. All faiths.

QUESTION: Yeah. Mr. Secretary, you have met Kim Jong-un. Have you raised directly with him the questions of religious freedom in his country?

SECRETARY POMPEO: I've not talked about the details of my conversation with Chairman Kim. The world should know, and your listeners should know, that in every place I go, whether they're countries with strong values of religious freedom or those that do not, we place this as a real priority and we raise this issue in countries that are difficult and challenging every time we confront them. We believe that religious freedom for every citizen of the world is something that's very important.

QUESTION: The religious – the Commission on Religious Freedom report that your department publishes has also accused Russia uniquely of repressing religious rights through the invasion of another country – that’s Crimea. It says Russia should be criticized in multilateral settings. Can the world rely on President Trump to publicly raise religious repression in Russia with President Putin in future?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Look, there are a lot of issues that we have with Russia, and the President just returned from Helsinki, where they discussed a broad range of issues and, frankly, broke some ground across a broad range of them. And our mission, Andrew, with this ministerial meeting is to re-force this set of issues. We’re going to have countries here that aren’t perfect, that are on the cusp of religious freedom. And we want to push them all in the right direction. And that’s our mission statement. We’re welcoming Christians and Muslims and Jews and people of diverse faiths from all across the world to become part of this. We believe this is a central pillar of American foreign policy, to have religious freedom at the front. We bring up these issues privately, and we bring them up publicly.

QUESTION: Is Russia going to be at the ministerial meeting?

SECRETARY POMPEO: I haven’t seen the full list. We’ve invited countries from all around the world.

QUESTION: Another area which is difficult for the United States is the question of Saudi Arabia. Ever since this religious freedom report has existed, Saudi Arabia has always gotten among the worst results. Why does the U.S. continue, however, to give Saudi Arabia a waiver or an exemption from sanctions even though the report recommends it?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Andrew, you have to remember the purpose of the gathering here for the next couple days. The mission is very clear. It’s to take each country and help make the case for them why it’s in the best interest of their citizenry and their country to grant rights of religious freedom. Not every country is in the same place. We recognize that; we are eyes-wide-open. But make no mistake about it, unlike previous administrations, we have raised this to every one of our foreign partners and friends, and they know it’s a priority for the United States and for this administration. We believe deeply in this and we’re working in every one of those countries to improve religious freedom for their citizens.

QUESTION: But Mr. Secretary, you yourself are a very sincere Evangelical Christian. You know that in Saudi Arabia, you would not be permitted to worship in your faith. Why does the United States continue this strategic partnership with a country that is so repressive against other religions?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Andrew, look, thanks for the question. I’ve got to run off now. But make no mistake about it, religious freedom is not the only issue that America faces with any one of our partners. It won’t be the only and sole focus. Our relationships are broad. They’re diverse; they cover lots of various issues. And we are acting to make sure that our relationships are in America’s best interest, and religious freedom is a central part of each one

of those.

Thanks, Andrew, for your time this morning.

QUESTION: Thank you, Mr. Secretary. Thank you.

SECRETARY POMPEO: Thank you. So long.

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[Press Releases: Secretary Pompeo's Call With Kuwait Foreign Minister Al-Sabah](#)

Readout
Office of the Spokesperson

Washington, DC
July 20, 2018

The below is attributable to Spokesperson Heather Nauert:□

Secretary Pompeo spoke with Kuwait Foreign Minister Sabah al-Khaled al-Hamad al-Sabah yesterday. The Secretary thanked the Foreign Minister for Kuwait's strong partnership and longtime friendship with the United States. The Secretary also expressed appreciation for Kuwait's continued support for humanitarian causes. They discussed the regional situation, including Iran, and how to further strengthen robust bilateral economic and trade ties.

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[Press Releases: Interview With Shannon Bream of Fox News](#)

Interview
Michael R. Pompeo

Secretary of State

Treaty Room
Washington, DC
July 19, 2018

QUESTION: Mr. Secretary, thank you for your time today. We're here to talk about an historic meeting that you've gathered next week on persecuted religious minorities around the globe, but first I want to get to some news of the day.

SECRETARY POMPEO: Yes, ma'am.

QUESTION: Let's talk about Russia. What do you make of the assessment our President appeared weak standing next to President Putin in Helsinki, and even allegations by lawmakers that he must, quote, "have something" on our President for him to be acting this way?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Well, Shannon, thanks for having me on today. I think those allegations are absurd. This administration has been relentless in its efforts to deter Russia from its bad behavior. We inherited a situation where Russia was running all over the United States. These last few days have been, frankly, more heat than light. This administration has been strong in supporting the Ukrainians, strong in making sure that we're protected against Russian expansion in other parts of the world. We all recognize that that threat is real, and President Trump has been strong in protecting America from Russian aggression.

QUESTION: *New York Times* is reporting that the President was fully briefed a

couple of weeks before the inauguration about meddling, presented compelling evidence about that. Do you worry as a member who has deep roots in the intel community that it appears he continues to equivocate on this issue of whether or not there has been Russian meddling?

SECRETARY POMPEO: I'm in a position to know. I did have the chance to talk to the President about this. Frankly, over the last – goodness – almost year and a half now, the President's consistently been briefed on this issue. He understands that the Russians have interfered in our elections. He, frankly, understands that's been going on for an awfully long time. It wasn't just the 2016 elections. Somehow America seems to forget the history of Russia's efforts to undermine Western democracy for decades now. It gets confused because there are those who want to make a partisan case out of this with respect to the Mueller investigation. The President understands what Russia did in our elections in 2016, but he has empowered each of us to make sure that it doesn't happen again in the 2018 or 2020 elections here in the United States as well.

QUESTION: And looking at those things moving forward, the President was asked repeatedly yesterday by a member of the press corps about whether he believes meddling is still ongoing. He responded, "Thank you. No." The White House says he was saying no to any further questions. Do you believe Russia is still meddling in our elections?

SECRETARY POMPEO: I have great confidence that the Russians will try and undermine Western democracy in 2017, 2018, 2019, and for an awfully long time. It is our responsibility as leaders of the United States Government to do all that we can to deter them from interfering with us, not only in our elections but more broadly as well.

QUESTION: The Russian ambassador to the U.S. is now saying that there were, quote, "important verbal agreements" made in private conversations between our presidents. Can you tell us anything about those?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Well, I'm not sure I'd take the Russian ambassador's word for a whole lot. From time to time they are wont to tell stories. Here's what I know. I'd have a chance to talk with President Trump about his discussions with President Putin. There was progress made on a handful of fronts: agreements to try and work more closely on counterterrorism, an effort to begin conversations around arms control to prevent the spread of nuclear proliferation. There were lots of things discussed. There remains a great deal of work to do, but the President accomplished one of his goals, which was to create a way where the two leaders of these important countries can have positive, constructive conversations that surround these incredibly important issues. There'll be lots of places our two countries' interests and values diverge. President Trump's deeply aware of that.

QUESTION: Any chance this administration would actually entertain the idea of allowing Putin or his – anyone from his team to have the ability to question or have physical custody of people like our former Ambassador McFaul or other DHS officials who've clearly been investigating things that are not beneficial to the Putin regime?

SECRETARY POMPEO: None.

QUESTION: Okay. Let's talk North Korea, because tomorrow you head to the UN to have –

SECRETARY POMPEO: I answered that question, Shannon, that quickly because it – I've watched the noise these last few days. The President's been very resolute. He understands precisely who it is we're dealing with in Russia. He gets it. He's trying to take opportunities, places where we find we can work together, and put America in a position to do the things he wants to do on behalf of the American people.

QUESTION: Okay. North Korea. Tomorrow you to the UN to have discussions about our ongoing conversations with them. What do you make of the reports and assessments that North Korea has no intention at all of getting rid of their nuclear ambitions or their program?

SECRETARY POMPEO: No one's been closer to that than I have, so everyone else is simply speculating about what's taken place to date. I've been there. The North Koreans have consistently reaffirmed their commitment, the commitment that Chairman Kim made to President Trump. No one was under any illusion that this was going to happen in hours or days or even weeks. It's going to take time to achieve this outcome. We hope for a brighter future for the North Korean people, and if Chairman Kim continues to follow through on his commitment, the people of North Korea will have a brighter future.

QUESTION: Let's talk about the historic meeting that you've put together, the ministerial-level meeting addressing religious freedom and persecution around the globe. Why was it important to you to do that?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Religious freedom is a fundamental human right. The State Department of the United States of America ought to be in the lead in promoting that religious freedom around the world. Shannon, not every country has the religious freedom we have here in the United States. Individuals are punished for their beliefs or, frankly, the absence of their beliefs. We ought to promote that around the world. I want the United States and our State Department to be front and center talking about religious freedom. Not every country will get to the place we want, but I'm confident that if we focus on this as part of American diplomacy, we can make the religious freedom for individuals all across the world at least a little bit better.

QUESTION: We have the case of the American pastor, Andrew Brunson, who is being held in Turkey, again yesterday denied freedom as what many are calling a sham trial continues on with him. Turkey is a NATO ally of ours. What can we do about that situation?

SECRETARY POMPEO: There's been enormous work done by this administration to try and gain the release of Pastor Brunson. We also have others held in Turkey, other Americans that – excuse me – others who worked for the United States held in Turkey today. We're working diligently on that case and, frankly, every place an American is held.

This is one example of why religious freedom matters, and so we're going to have over 80 delegations here at the State Department in a handful of days, 40 of my counterparts, foreign ministers. This is a historic opportunity. The Vice President will be speaking at the event. We believe that we can increase the capacity for human dignity and religious freedom by gathering the nations of the world and working together to get outcomes so we can prevent situations just like the one that Pastor Brunson is experiencing today.

QUESTION: Do you think that there are – you mentioned, obviously, our country is unique when it comes to the issue of religious freedom. How much do you think you can cut across some of those biases and other theocratic areas around the world where this is a real issue, life and death for many people?

SECRETARY POMPEO: It is indeed life and death. That's why this ministerial gathering is so important. We're under no illusions. We don't think we're going to change each of these countries to become as religiously tolerant as the United States is. But we've seen this every time we take an action to protect from anti-Semitism or protect Christian freedoms or protect others from across a broad range of religious faiths. Every time we act in that way and gather the nations of the world to talk about why that matters to make their country better, we think it's real progress and we think every little increase in religious freedom is better for the world.

QUESTION: I wish you great success in that, Mr. Secretary.

SECRETARY POMPEO: Thank you, Shannon.

QUESTION: Thank you for your time.

SECRETARY POMPEO: Wonderful to be with you.

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[Press Releases: Interview With Lauren Ashburn of EWTN](#)

Interview
Michael R. Pompeo

Secretary of State

Treaty Room
Washington, DC
July 19, 2018

QUESTION: Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, welcome to News Nightly. Thank you for joining us.

SECRETARY POMPEO: It's wonderful to be with you.

QUESTION: This has been quite a week. President Putin and President Trump gave a press conference that was condemned by the left and right. Was that press conference criticism warranted?

SECRETARY POMPEO: There's been a lot of heat and very little light following that press conference. I was there. I watched the President's interaction with President Putin after their one-on-one meeting. The President had the objective of taking two countries that'd been on a bad path and trying to redirect that. There's no illusion about the challenges that Russia presents to the United States. But in places like counterterrorism and – these are two nuclear-armed nations, if we can reduce the risk from those nuclear weapons. The President was aiming towards creating a channel for communication and dialogue, and he achieved that.

QUESTION: Did you advise him to retract his statements?

SECRETARY POMPEO: I don't talk about the things I give the President advice on. But I'm always very candid about what it is I think we need to do to make sure to keep America safe. And the President has always been gracious in allowing me to say my piece.

QUESTION: Will we see transcripts from either the North Korea meeting or the Russia meeting?

SECRETARY POMPEO: I'd be very surprised if we see transcripts from either. That would be ahistorical. There are conversations that I've had with the North Koreans, conversations that government officials have all across the USG that aren't appropriate for public release.

QUESTION: Let's move on to religious freedom. You have convened a ministerial to talk about religious freedom all around the world. Let's start with Russia. Russia, especially when it comes to Jehovah's Witnesses, is very bad at allowing people to practice their faith. Will religious freedom be on the table when negotiating with Russia?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Well, thanks for mentioning the ministerial that's going to

(inaudible). It's truly historic. It's the first time the State Department has led such a discussion. We'll have over 80 delegations from countries around the world, many, many religious organizations, NGOs. It should be a great gathering where we will make the point that religious freedom is a human right and that every individual ought to have their right to practice their particular religion, or if they have no faith, to not be punished for that either.

QUESTION: Will there be sanctions if they do not come to the table with religious freedom changes?

SECRETARY POMPEO: So with Russia in particular, we have a very complex set of relationships. There are many things that are on the table. I think your viewers ought to know that the State Department takes this issue of religious freedom very seriously. In conversations with countries that don't live up to the standards of religious freedom that they ought to have, we raise that issue, sometimes privately if we think that's the most effective way to achieve the change that we're looking for, and sometimes publicly if we think that will accomplish our goal.

QUESTION: When you announced this ministerial, you said that you would bring like-minded countries together. People made a big deal about that. Will Russia be at the table? Will Syria? Will Iran?

SECRETARY POMPEO: There's lots of folks coming. I haven't seen the final RSVP tally. And I'm sure there'll be countries here that we have deep disagreements with. But the – when I said like-minded, I meant those countries that are prepared to begin their walk towards the religious freedom that we have enshrined in our Constitution and that our nation so values and cherishes.

QUESTION: American pastor Andrew Brunson is imprisoned in Turkey on false charges of terrorism and espionage. He's awaiting his fourth hearing.

SECRETARY POMPEO: Yeah, we need to get him out. He needs to come home.

QUESTION: Well, you brought the North Korea hostages home. Why can't we bring Brunson home?

SECRETARY POMPEO: We're working it. It's a priority. We're in conversations every day in the State Department with elements of the Turkish Government. We are – we remain hopeful and prayerful that Pastor Brunson will be able to return home before too terribly long.

QUESTION: I visited the Nineveh Plains in Iraq. We've seen the destruction in a place where the U.S. declared genocide. I walked into bombed-out churches. People have nowhere to live. Total towns are decimated. The U.S. is providing aid to that area, to both Christians and others. How does the U.S. convince governments, not just in the Middle East, to respect religious freedom for all citizens, including Saudi Arabia, where you're not allowed to practice another religion?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Yes, ma'am. The Trump administration has been incredibly

strong in promoting religious freedom. It is the case that there are many countries – indeed countries that we often work alongside, who are allies in other places – we work to demonstrate to them that religious tolerance and freedom is good for them. It's good for their country; it's good for their government. It'll bring investors; it'll make their people more productive. We think these are all – this fundamental human right, this concept that every individual ought to have the right to practice their own faith, we think makes their countries stronger too. And we work to make that case both by speaking to them about it and, in America, demonstrating that in the way that we act and operate and the way that when U.S. Government officials are out and about we respect each of their capacity to worship in the way that they desire.

QUESTION: There are issues of religious freedom here in the U.S. How can you take the moral high ground unless those are addressed?

SECRETARY POMPEO: My faith teaches me that imperfection is all around us, and when it comes to government that's certainly the case as well. I think the United States stands as an enormous beacon of religious freedom. I'm confident that we can always do better. We ought to do that here as well. But we stand strong here in the United States for religious tolerance and freedom, and I think that's an important demonstration to the world of how valuable that fundamental human right can be to a strong and successful nation.

QUESTION: U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, thank you for joining me.

SECRETARY POMPEO: It's great to be with you.

QUESTION: For coming on EWTN News Nightly.

SECRETARY POMPEO: Yes, ma'am. Thank you.

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[Press Releases: Interview With Tony Perkins of FRC Radio](#)

Interview

Michael R. Pompeo

Secretary of State

Via Telephone

July 19, 2018

QUESTION: Welcome back to Washington Watch. I'm your host, Tony Perkins. So glad to have you with us. Wednesday, we had one of my fellow commissioners from the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, Kristina, join us from Turkey with the news that American pastor Andrew Brunson was not going to be released from prison in Turkey, where he has been held for the last two years.

Now, Pastor Brunson's case is reflective of a growing threat to religious freedom and the spread of religious persecution around the globe that really has reached historic proportions, so much so that the Secretary of State Mike Pompeo has called for the first-ever Ministerial to Advance Religious Freedom, which will take place next week. The three-day event will bring together government officials, representatives of international organizations, religious leaders, rights advocates, and members of civil society organizations from around the world, and I'll be there as well.

With us now is the host of the event, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo. Secretary, welcome to Washington Watch.

SECRETARY POMPEO: Tony, it's great to be back on with you.

QUESTION: It's been a while. And it's great to have you on in this new capacity. And let me first just commend you for one of your first actions as Secretary is to call for this gathering of international leaders to discuss religious freedom.

I want to start with the obvious question: Why?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Tony, it's incredibly important in our administration, in President Trump's administration, to make the case and sound the clarion call for religious freedom all around the world. You mentioned Pastor Brunson. There are many countries in which religious freedom is not available. And we believe that by gathering citizens from around the world – we'll have over 80 delegations from different countries; forty-plus of my counterparts at the foreign minister level will be in attendance – and religious leaders like yourself all brought together to highlight the central nature of religious freedom, and it's important to individuals and countries.

We believe that religious freedom is important for every citizen around the world and we want to bring everyone together to discuss how all faiths have

the right – people, individuals have the right to worship in the way that they choose, or if they choose not to. And every country ought to honor that.

QUESTION: Now, Mr. Secretary, you and I have been around government for quite some time. And a lot of times there's a lot of meetings and there's not always tangible outcomes. I know you're a man of action. What do you hope will be the tangible outcomes of this gathering?

SECRETARY POMPEO: We expect, Tony, this to be far more than just talk. We do believe that just putting people together from all across the world in a room and talking about this topic will empower them to go back to their home country and advocate for religious freedom as well. It's difficult, Tony, as you know, in many countries to even speak about religious freedom. And so we hope to provide a support system and a basis for some of them to head back to their own countries.

But we'll announce a number of initiatives. The Vice President will be speaking; Ambassador Brownback will be speaking there. And we will be laying out a path where we are hopeful that the State Department here in the United States can lead a process where religious freedom is raised as a priority for the citizens of every country. And we will have our teams in the subsequent weeks and months in the field talking about religious freedom on a continued basis. We'll have just three days here, but this will be a mission of the State Department every day.

QUESTION: Now, Secretary Pompeo, this is the first ever, and I don't want this to be lost on our listeners. As you pointed out, this issue of religious freedom, both domestically and from a foreign policy standpoint, is a priority for this administration. This is much more than lip service. I mean, this administration takes this serious.

SECRETARY POMPEO: You've seen that with President Trump very clearly. Look, we want people of all faiths – Christians, Muslims, Jews, people of all different faiths – we think that this forum will reinforce for countries that enjoy that religious freedom and encourage those that are on the cusp, who are in a place where it's more challenging, will help provide them a courage to continue to make religious freedom a priority for the citizens of their own countries as well. This was laid out in the President's National Security Strategy, which is unique and different from previous administrations. We do place a high priority on religious freedom and we can – we will continue to fight for it every place that we travel.

QUESTION: What has been the response from your counterparts around the globe?

SECRETARY POMPEO: It's been remarkable. I literally, as I was traveling this past week – I think I was in six or eight different places – I had foreign ministers say, "I'm going to be there," and I hadn't seen the list. They're excited to come be around others who believe religious freedom is important. I was in Muslim countries; I was in places with religions very different than my own Christian faith. But every one of those leaders was excited about the opportunity to gather with likeminded individuals who share the desire, the quest for every individual to be able to practice their faith in their

country in the way that they wish to do.

QUESTION: And I know from my role at USCIRF that there's actually countries that are on a waiting list. There's people wanting to get to the –

SECRETARY POMPEO: (Laughter.) It is indeed oversubscribed, Tony, which we consider an enormous blessing.

QUESTION: It is.

SECRETARY POMPEO: And we're going to do our best to accommodate each and every one of them so that they can come be part of this. And it bodes well for continuity for a program like this as well, not just these three days but to make sure that there are real actions that follow from this event.

QUESTION: One final question for you, Mr. Secretary. I know you've got a busy schedule. What can the average American do to bring greater awareness to this issue of religious freedom? Not just as an American right, but as the State Department and the United States Government recognizes this is a human right. What can we be doing?

SECRETARY POMPEO: It is deeply a human right. I think we can do a number of things. I think those of us who believe in faith and prayer can pray. I think it's important for every individual to demand of their elected officials that they consider religious freedom among one of their priorities as they seek to lead and to be part of government service. And then I just think it's important that groups – we have dozens and dozens of NGOs that will be attending this – to support groups like that and nongovernmental organizations that are prepared to help fight for religious freedom all around the world.

QUESTION: Do you anticipate seeing movement in countries like Turkey, like North Korea? I mean, do you really think this – during this Trump administration that we're going to see movement?

SECRETARY POMPEO: We've seen some already. A good case in point would be Uzbekistan that has begun to move in the right direction. Tony, you know this is a long march, but absent leadership, absent the State Department engaging in this as an important priority, we know that the likelihood of it happening is less so. So we'll work in every place to raise the awareness of the centrality of religious freedom not only for individual human dignity, but for success of nations as well.

QUESTION: Mr. Secretary, thank you so much for coming back on Washington Watch in your new capacity, and I look forward to seeing you next week at the ministerial.

SECRETARY POMPEO: Bless you, Tony. I look forward to seeing you next week as well. So long, sir.

QUESTION: All right. Thanks so much.

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