

Press Releases: Secretary Pompeo's Call With Kuwait Foreign Minister Al-Sabah

Readout
Office of the Spokesperson

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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 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: 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 Nike Ching of VOA](#)

Interview

Michael R. Pompeo

Secretary of State

Treaty Room
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QUESTION: Secretary Pompeo, thank you very much for talking to Voice of America.

SECRETARY POMPEO: It's great to be with you on Voice of America. Thank you. Thank you for having me on today.

QUESTION: On the ethnic cleansing against the Rohingya Muslims, with the Buddhists being the majority in Myanmar, the purge against Rohingya is sometimes characterized by some as religious cleansing. At the same time, killing is the worst crime for Buddhism and for many religion. Would you go further to identify the Rohingya crisis as the religious cleansing?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Well, the State Department made a decision at the end of last year to make the important statement about ethnic cleansing, and we know that there is a religious connection there. It's incredibly important that we're careful in the language that we use, and so we'll continue to review it. But as you well know, the State Department considers religious freedom at the center of its activity. We make that a priority in all of the work that we do, and in places in Asia, that is absolutely no exception.

QUESTION: Would you consider a comprehensive arms embargo and more targeted financial sanctions against tough Burmese military leaders for their involvement of the Rohingya purge?

SECRETARY POMPEO: I don't want to get out ahead of the President on this, but you should know we take these issues incredibly seriously and your viewers should know that as well. There are many things that are under consideration by this administration. We want to see the course changing; we want to see the directional change here. We have not seen that yet, and so there are many things that are being considered by the United States Government to ensure that everyone understands that their behavior is not acceptable.

QUESTION: In China, the State Department's International Religious Freedom Report documented the repression against the Uighur Muslims and Tibetan Buddhists. First of all, would you – how would you respond to the assertion from the Chinese Government that some of the groups are separatist? And secondly, would you consider a travel ban or working with the Treasury Department to freeze the U.S. assets of those Chinese officials who are involved in such repression?

SECRETARY POMPEO: So the State Department has made clear that with respect to this issue, we think they're on the wrong side of religious freedom, that they're a country of concern connected to that. We understand that religious freedom is at risk in many places in the world, and yet the United States has complex, broad relationships with many countries, including China, across economic and military and political sets of issues.

Your viewers should know the United States also puts religious freedom, this fundamental human right, at the very center of our discussions with every country with whom we interact.

QUESTION: Religious freedom is a universal value, as you mentioned. How would you respond to the Chinese assertion that some of the surveillance program is to prevent a terrorist attack?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Well, I don't want to comment. Every country does work to make sure that their citizens are safe, but we should never – no country should ever use that effort, the guise of a counterterrorism investigation, to persecute religious freedom. Religious freedom is separate and apart from that. Every human, by nature of their dignity as a human being, deserves the capacity to worship in the way that they want to worship, or if they choose not to – to worship at all, so be it. No one should be punished by their government for their religious beliefs or the religious activities connected to those beliefs.

QUESTION: We – while we are sitting here, critics, including State Department's own report, said that in eastern Ukraine, Russia-led forces continue to occupy religious buildings of religious minority groups for the use of – for the military facilities. You were at Helsinki. Was that a good meeting, and how has Russia's activities in eastern Ukraine been discussed?

SECRETARY POMPEO: So I've seen those reports about the Russians' use of religious facilities. That's never acceptable. It violates all sorts of central premises of how nations ought to be able to use religious facilities to protect your forces, creates real challenges.

With respect to Helsinki, President Trump made clear to Vladimir Putin that their activities in eastern Ukraine weren't in Russia's best interest. This administration's been incredibly tough. We've provided support to the Ukrainian forces there in southeast Ukraine that the previous administration repeatedly refused to do. We think this creates a space for the Ukrainian people to have a successful election come 2019, and we are very, very hopeful that that situation will resolve itself as America has made its continued commitment to support the Ukrainian people's desires.

QUESTION: The time is running out, so for the last question, you mentioned Russia. So there has been a lot of concern over Russia proposal to question former Ambassador McFaul. Do you have any –

SECRETARY POMPEO: Yeah, let me just stop you. It's not going to happen. The Russians made a proposal about a number of things during the course of the conversations between President Trump and President Putin. There were

suggestions, comments, thoughts by President Putin with respect to that inquiry. President Trump was very clear we're not going to force Americans to go to Russia to be interrogated by the Russians. There's been a lot of noise about that; I don't know why. Just – the American people should rest assured.

QUESTION: Thank you very much for talking to VOA.

SECRETARY POMPEO: Great, thank you. It was wonderful to be with you.

QUESTION: Sure.

SECRETARY POMPEO: Thank you, ma'am.

QUESTION: Thank you.

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