

Press Releases: Interview With Yonit Levi of Channel 12

Interview
Michael R. Pompeo

Secretary of State

David Citadel Hotel, Jerusalem
March 21, 2019

QUESTION: Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, thank you so much for finding the time to talk to us in this whirlwind of a tour of yours, sir.

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

QUESTION: This is an important visit to Kuwait, to Israel, and to Lebanon. Here in Israel, however, sir, we're in the final stages of a very intense election race, and Netanyahu's detractors are saying that the Trump administration is doing all in its power – and undoubtedly, it has power – to ensure that Netanyahu gets re-elected. How do you respond to that?

SECRETARY POMPEO: So my trip and, frankly, the prime minister's visit to Washington next week, are about really – real pressing issues, things that matter to the world. They are time-sensitive, whether it's the challenges that are presented by the Islamic Republic of Iran or the issues in Syria. These are issues that can't wait, and they don't work on election clocks. Our mission is to work the power of the United States and Israel together against these common threats, and it's why I'm here today and I know it's what the President and prime minister will talk about next week as well.

QUESTION: President Trump said in Hanoi three weeks ago that Netanyahu was a strong leader, and then you said he'll be accepted in Washington with all the pomp and circumstance that he – that will happen next week. You're here with all the images that generates. This does add some inordinate amount of political cache for Netanyahu at a critical time obviously here.

SECRETARY POMPEO: Qasem Soleimani doesn't care about your election. Qasem Soleimani is continuing to press the case. Hizballah's continuing to press its case. Each and every day, the Islamic Republic of Iran is continuing to – its efforts to wipe Israel off the face of the planet. There's no time like the present to make sure and address this issue. It's why I'm here today. It's why I'll be in Lebanon tomorrow and the next day to talk about these issues that are truly of the moment.

QUESTION: Can you ensure the Israeli public that the warm relationship between the American leadership and the Israeli leadership will continue even if Netanyahu loses on April 9th?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Oh, I fully expect that's the case. The history of the relationship between our two countries is deep. It is strong. It survives presidents and prime ministers. It is truly between the two nations where its peoples have shared common value sets, two democracies, two nations that care deeply about the well-being of their people, and two nations that share a set of common threats as well.

QUESTION: It is obviously a common practice upon diplomatic visits to a democratic ally to also meet leaders of the opposition. Have you met, spoken with Benny Gantz or any other leaders of the opposition?

SECRETARY POMPEO: I haven't on this trip, but Mr. Gantz has met with other American leaders. The Israeli people will speak in a handful of days. They'll make their decision, and America and Israel will move forward together.

QUESTION: So let's move from the political quagmire in Israel to a very simple task of bringing peace to the Middle East. And every – the architects of the deal, it's coined "the deal of the century," whether if it's Kushner or Ambassador Friedman or Greenblatt, are keeping the cards quite close to the chest. It's very frustrating for us journalists. But can I ask you to divulge anything about the plan? President Trump said famously, I'm happy if it's one state, I'm happy if it's two state, if the parties themselves are happy with it. Can you tell us if the term "two-state solution" will appear in the final plan?

SECRETARY POMPEO: So I can't share much about it. We're still working our way through it. In due course, we'll present the plan. The whole world will get a chance to see the vision that we have for how we might bring peace to solve this intractable problem.

QUESTION: Due course is weeks, months? When should we expect it?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Well, soon. I appreciate you asking, but soon enough, when the time is most appropriate. Remember the mission set. We want a better life for the Palestinian people. I know the Israeli people want that, too. We want peace between the Palestinians and the Israelis. These are commonly held objectives. A broadly shared vision for how to achieve it is something that we're hoping that the ideas that we'll be bringing forth will achieve.

QUESTION: But is it – obviously, if you say something like autonomy, which is what Ambassador Friedman said to *The Washington Examiner*, Palestinians, for them, it's a nonstarter. They're not going to be in the table, they're not even going to be in the same universe, if that's what the plan is going to say.

SECRETARY POMPEO: Well, I'm hopeful. I've seen the plan. I have a pretty good understanding of its details, although there are a handful still to be worked out. I'm very hopeful that all nations – the Israelis, the Palestinian

people, the Arab states, European countries, people from all around the world – will stare at this plan and say this has got merit, this has legs, this is a reason that we can begin to build and move forward. I expect that that will be the case.

We hope that when we present it, everyone will take this seriously, they'll give it good thought. There may be things they don't like, there may be things they love about the ideas that we put forth, but they'll use it as a platform that we can build on to achieve what, frankly, administrations before us have tried to help achieve but have been unsuccessful.

QUESTION: But again, is this going to be in that vision of the historic U.S. policy of two states, or it's going to be something completely different?

SECRETARY POMPEO: We'll just have to wait and see.

QUESTION: (Laughter.) You're good at building the tension on this, sir. Is it true that the United States had to wait until after the election to publish it, to not – to foil Netanyahu's situation here?

SECRETARY POMPEO: No, look, we've been waiting for the right time until we had the plan fully developed, that we'd had input from lots of different people with lots of different thoughts about how to achieve the right outcome. So it's taken some time for us to get ready, and when the moment is right we'll share that vision.

QUESTION: You mentioned the Iranian threat, and obviously it's been – Israel has hailed the President Trump's decision to basically withdraw from the nuclear agreement with Iran. What is the endgame, sir? Is the endgame to put pressure on Iran and to get a better deal? Or would the endgame, in your opinion, be regime change or anything of that sort?

SECRETARY POMPEO: So the way we think about this is in a broader context, right. The objective is stability in the Middle East and peace and less violence in the Middle East and fewer times where there are crises here in the Middle East. That's the objective.

Today, the primary mover for malign influence in the Middle East is the Islamic Republic of Iran, whether that's the assassination campaign in Europe, the funding of the Houthis, the money that goes to Hamas and Hizballah, the support for the PMCs in Iraq, the malfeasance in Syria. The list of Iranian aggression and threats to the world is long. What we're asking Iran to do is simply stop those things, to behave like a normal nation, like we ask every other country to behave. If they do those things, we'll all move forward together.

As for the JCPOA, look, it was a disastrous deal. It guaranteed that Iran would have a path to a nuclear weapon. It was unacceptable. It was unacceptable for America, it was unacceptable for Israel, in our judgment an unacceptable risk to the world. So we withdrew from that. Today, we're engaged in a pressure campaign to convince the Iranian regime to stay away from the nuclear weapons program, to stay away from developing that nuclear

capability, and to engage in the world in a way that normal nations do.

QUESTION: By the way, you were CIA director. Do you see any sort of work by Iranians to relentlessly break into Israeli officials' phones? Do you know of any of that kind of attempt?

SECRETARY POMPEO: So I don't want to talk about specifics, but suffice it to say we've made clear that the Iranian efforts – their cyber campaigns, their efforts to break into technology all across the world – are real. They are sophisticated and require attention from the best counter-cyber teams in the world, among those the United States and Israel.

QUESTION: Are you planning on changing or saying that the U.S. will recognize Israeli sovereignty in the Golan Heights?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Yeah, I don't have anything to add for you today.

QUESTION: Sir, my final question, if that's okay. You jokingly said that the President might one day end your job with a tweet. You're very close to the President. I wonder if what we're seeing is sort of the era of diplomacy on Twitter or decision making on Twitter or governance on Twitter, actually.

SECRETARY POMPEO: No, I was just talking about something that cabinet officials say all the time. They serve at the pleasure of the President. At any moment the President decides that he doesn't want us to do that anymore, we will graciously move on with our lives. We serve at his pleasure. That was my point that I said in a kidding fashion.

No, I don't think we're seeing diplomacy by Twitter. It still requires thoughtfulness, it requires resources, it requires capability and determination. But the ability to communicate, the ability to rapidly spread messages around the world through social media, including Twitter, is absolutely important. It allows leaders around the world to share their views instantaneously with millions of people, something that was more difficult before. And that's our real power; it's another element to the capacity to shape the world.

QUESTION: Yeah, and obviously there's the importance of personal conversation. Secretary Mike Pompeo, again, thank you so much for talking with us.

SECRETARY POMPEO: Thank you very much.

QUESTION: Thank you.

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Press Releases: Interview With Barak Ravid of Channel 13

Interview
Michael R. Pompeo

Secretary of State

David Citadel Hotel, Jerusalem
March 21, 2019

QUESTION: Secretary Pompeo, thank you for granting us this interview.

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

QUESTION: Let's dive right in. Your visit here is three weeks before the elections in Israel. Aren't you concerned that it might be perceived as interference?

SECRETARY POMPEO: I came here because there's pressing issues. As I told someone earlier, Qassem Soleimani's not watching the election. All the folks who are trying to do harm and destruction to Israel and to the United States aren't watching the election. I'm here because there's real business, real pressing issues, and those are the topics with which I've spoken with the Israeli officials that I've met with.

QUESTION: Because we heard President Trump in Vietnam just the other week giving support to Prime Minister Netanyahu; he will be hosting Netanyahu next week at the White House. It seems a bit like an endorsement.

SECRETARY POMPEO: Well, look, the President and the prime minister have a relationship. But I'm here because of the important relationship between the United States and Israel. This is a long, long-term relationship and an incredibly important one to both countries, and we have to get this right. We have to get it right always, and we can't let election schedules drive the work that we're doing together.

QUESTION: President Trump did something very interesting. He brought back the word "peace" into the Israeli political debate. When is the administration going to unveil its peace plan?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Soon.

QUESTION: Meaning?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Stay tuned. I don't have a date. We want to do several things. We want to make sure we have the vision, the vision that we intend to set out, as right as we can possibly make it. We want to make sure that when we unveil and when we share it with the world that it is good enough, that it will be thoughtfully considered by all parties, certainly by the Palestinians and by the Israelis but by everyone in the world who has been trying for decades to resolve this conflict. And we're hopeful that what we present will be a building block so that good things can continue to happen.

QUESTION: So let's talk about Palestinians. They're not really talking to you for more than a year. They say that any plan you'll put on the table will actually be a Bibi plan. Doesn't this mean that the peace plan, your peace plan, might be dead on arrival?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Well, I don't expect that. I hope that the Palestinians will give it due consideration. I expect actually that they will. The United States wants good things for the Palestinian people, and our plan will show that. You'll see that. When you see the plan, you will see the evidence that we want that. I hope that the Palestinians, both on the West Bank and in the Gaza Strip, will give this due consideration; they'll provide their feedback. There'll be things that they like; there may well be things that they don't like. What we hope is they will take a good look at it, a serious look at it, give it due consideration, and then it can provide the basis for moving forward.

QUESTION: Will this peace plan endorse the two-state solution?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Yeah, just stay tuned.

QUESTION: No, because President Trump said last September at the UN – and you were there –

SECRETARY POMPEO: I was there.

QUESTION: – he said that he prefers a two-state solution.

SECRETARY POMPEO: I was sitting there. What he really said was that this will ultimately be figured out between the Palestinians and the Israeli people.

QUESTION: You visited the Western Wall today together with Prime Minister Netanyahu. Does this mean that it's a policy shift by the Trump administration and that now you recognize the Western Wall as part of Israel?

SECRETARY POMPEO: That was a very special trip. I was honored to be there. I was honored to be at the Western Wall any time, but it was especially nice to be there with the prime minister of Israel. There's no policy change. I wanted to go there, be there, and I'm really happy that I had that opportunity. We had the chance, too, to go down and see the tunnels, some of the history, some of the amazing history of the Jewish people here, dating back thousands of years. That history was special; the moment with the prime minister was special. And it's always great to be in the city of Jerusalem.

QUESTION: After you moved the embassy to Jerusalem, President Trump said that now it will be Israel's turn to pay a price. Does this mean that your peace plan will include some sort of a Palestinian capital in East Jerusalem?

SECRETARY POMPEO: I'm not going to talk about the plan itself. You can ask several more times if you want.

QUESTION: I'm trying, I'm trying.

SECRETARY POMPEO: I appreciate that.

QUESTION: You can give me that.

SECRETARY POMPEO: No, I have great respect for you for continuing to ask. What you'll see, when you see the plan, is you will see a vision for what we believe is a carefully thought out process by which a good outcome can be delivered for all the people in the region. We hope everyone will see that, we hope the Arabs, the Europeans, the Palestinians, the Israelis, everyone will – who will ultimately have some say and provide their input will see it for what it is: a sincere effort to resolve this long-time conflict.

QUESTION: Do you expect the Israeli Government to say yes?

SECRETARY POMPEO: We'll have to see. We – our expectation of everyone is that they'll read it, they'll take a good look, and that they'll share with us what – the pieces they find acceptable, those that they'd like to see some way different. We'll begin to build it forward.

QUESTION: Do you think that the unity government in Israel after the elections might help promoting this plan?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Goodness, I don't know. Do you know how the elections are going to end? (Laughter.)

QUESTION: Do you? Do you have a guess? Do you want to share?

SECRETARY POMPEO: I do not. I do not. I thought maybe you had some insights.

QUESTION: You want to take a bet?

SECRETARY POMPEO: (Laughter.) I'll stay. I've got plenty of challenges without involving myself in the outcome of the Israeli elections.

QUESTION: So let's move to Syria. Does the Trump administration consider recognizing Israeli sovereignty in the Golan Heights?

SECRETARY POMPEO: So we're always considering lots of different things, and certainly we've considered many things when it comes to how to treat different challenges in Syria. When we think of Syria, we think about it as a big problem. It has been a place where ISIS has festered. We are almost done completing the destruction of the caliphate, something that we're very proud of that we worked alongside 80-plus nations to achieve. We saw the work that was done against ISIS in Iraq, so from – literally from Iraq to Lebanon, the

place that I'm traveling next, the challenges that are faced are real. The Islamic Republic of Iran is at the center of most of those challenges and we're determined in each of those places to put America and Israel in a better place in the coming weeks and months.

QUESTION: Does this mean that you think or that the administration thinks that the Golan Heights needs to be part of Israel in any future solution?

SECRETARY POMPEO: We'll – the President will ultimately make that decision. I don't have anything to announce here today.

QUESTION: Was there any discussion already inside the administration about this issue of recognizing Israeli sovereignty of the Golan Heights?

SECRETARY POMPEO: I've been really good in my almost a year as Secretary of State not talking about internal debates. I'm going to keep my record flawless.

QUESTION: But I heard Prime Minister Netanyahu say that publicly, when you gave a statement –

SECRETARY POMPEO: Yes, it's something – it's something he'd clearly like.

QUESTION: And did he raise it in your meeting?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Yes. We've talked about it on a number of occasions.

QUESTION: And what did you tell him?

SECRETARY POMPEO: I told him the same thing I just told you. (Laughter.)

QUESTION: But let's stay on Syria. Many in Israel and other places in the world, but in Israel in particular, are concerned about the U.S. pullout from Syria. I think people see, in a way, the U.S. getting out and the Russians and the Iranians coming in.

SECRETARY POMPEO: Yeah. They're just wrong. First, America is not pulling out, but remember, there's been all this focus on the number of soldiers there in Syria. What's really important is the mission set, so multiple mission sets. The first one is the defeat and the destruction of the caliphate, then again pushing back against the broader challenges of radical Islamic terrorism – not only ISIS, but al-Qaida, all the folks that are up in Idlib. This terror issue is real. The United States has many platforms, many places from which we effectuate that.

The second piece is our campaign against Iran. It has lots of pieces. So while there's been this inordinate focus on how many American soldiers might be in Syria, I can tell your viewers American policy has not changed one iota. Our mission, the defeat of ISIS, pushing back against the threat from radical Islamic terrorism and pushing back against the Islamic Republic of Iran remains unchanged.

QUESTION: The last two questions before we finish: I want to talk to you

about Jonathan Pollard, the Israeli spy. Will the Trump administration consider dropping the limitations on Mr. Pollard and allowing him to travel to Israel?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Yeah, I don't have anything to say there. It's a matter that's not in my purview.

QUESTION: So you didn't discuss this with Prime Minister Netanyahu?

SECRETARY POMPEO: I don't want to talk about the private conversations that I had on issues that are of that nature.

QUESTION: Last question: How concerned is the Trump administration by the growing ties between Israel and China?

SECRETARY POMPEO: So, China broadly presents a real opportunity. They're an economic powerhouse and there are lots of opportunities that countries have to do business with China. When China behaves transparently, when China is engaged in real economic transactions, we are untroubled. When China behaves using debt as a trap, when China bribes, when China engages in spying through its commercial state-owned enterprises, and presents risk through its technology systems – companies like Huawei which present real risk to the people of Israel – when those things happen, we want to make sure that countries know about it, know the risks, and then countries will make their own sovereign decisions. We'll have to do the same. Where some –

QUESTION: So do you want to see a policy shift in Israel towards China?

SECRETARY POMPEO: I want to make sure that every country is wide-eyed and awake with respect to the threats that are posed by China and then make sure they understand as well America will have to make decisions too. If certain systems go in certain places, then America's efforts to work alongside you will be more difficult, and in some cases, we won't be able to do so.

QUESTION: Like intelligence sharing?

SECRETARY POMPEO: You can imagine lots of different places. Intelligence sharing might have to be reduced, co-location of security facilities might have to be reduced. We want to make sure that countries understand this and know these risks.

QUESTION: Mr. Secretary, thank you very much for this interview.

SECRETARY POMPEO: Thank you very much, sir.

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Press Releases: Interview With Manayer Ebrahim Al-Qallaf of Kuwait Television

Interview
Michael R. Pompeo

Secretary of State

Kuwait City, Kuwait
March 20, 2019

QUESTION: Mr. Secretary, thank you for having us today, and it's a privilege to be with you today.

SECRETARY POMPEO: It's wonderful to be with you. Thank you for your time today.

QUESTION: First of all, let me go through the deep relationship that are shared among the state of Kuwait and the United States of America. Would you further elaborate on the history of these friendly ties?

SECRETARY POMPEO: So the two nations have a long, storied, proud tradition partnering together, working alongside each other against threats all throughout the region. We all know the stories from the early 1990s, but the stories go on even these past years, where we work together on so many things. It's what I'm here today to do, to continue to develop the partnership between the United States and Kuwait.

QUESTION: Yes. Mr. Secretary, you will be holding several meetings during your visit in Kuwait, including the third Kuwait-U.S. Strategic Dialogue. Let us know more about it.

SECRETARY POMPEO: So there are many components to it. I will, I'll get a chance to meet with His Majesty the Amir, my foreign ministry counterpart, the deputy prime minister. The strategic dialogue has been going on now since 2016, and we'll talk about the important strategic elements of our relationship, our security relationship to be sure, where we keep both the people of the United States and Kuwait safer as a result. But there are important economic pillars to this as well, and our political relationship matters, whether we're countering ISIS or the threats that Iran presents to the region, working to make sure that the Gulf Cooperation Council is working

and functioning and delivering security and peace to the region. These will be all parts of our agenda today and I am confident we'll make progress on each of those things.

QUESTION: Yes, connected to the agenda, Mr. Secretary, how do you think the agenda will help strengthen mutual cooperation between both countries?

SECRETARY POMPEO: So we'll sign some agreements today too, which I think will be important. They'll deepen the economic relationship. Kuwait and Kuwaiti companies are big investors in the United States, and many American companies are part of the Kuwaiti economy. These are deep, strong, proud commercial relationships that build on the security relationship between our two countries as well.

QUESTION: Yes. Mr. Secretary, regarding your tour to the Middle East and several Arab capitals, including Egypt, Amman, and the Gulf, GCC, like Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Bahrain, now Kuwait. So of course, it has like a certain – the GCC has, like, their common stances and views on the regional and international issues. In your opinion, Mr. Secretary, what would your visit add on this regard?

SECRETARY POMPEO: So I've been to the Middle East many times. I've had great meetings. I've been here to Kuwait several times before as well. Each time we're able to build on what we've done before, and the world changes. The threats change as well. And so each of the encounters – I'll travel from here to Israel and then on to Lebanon – in each place we'll be working on a set of common objectives. There will be places too where we'll have different views, where we'll have different ideas about how to solve these particular problems, and having these meetings, both with me and my counterparts and each of our teams, to begin to work on how we actually execute and implement those shared objectives.

QUESTION: Yes, let me close this with this question, and I will talk about the role of His Majesty, the Amir of Kuwait, Sheikh Sabah al-Ahmad Jabir al-Sabah, about his mediation in the GCC conflict or issues and the humanitarian part, like helping the Syrian and Yemeni and Iraqi people. How do you describe that, Mr. Secretary?

SECRETARY POMPEO: So His Majesty the Amir has done fantastic work on each of those fronts. Kuwait and the Kuwaiti people have been most generous in helping with the humanitarian crisis. You mentioned Syria. You mentioned Yemen, an enormous humanitarian challenge. Kuwait has been at the forefront of trying to provide assistance for those in the region who really need help, and he has also been determined to try and make sure that all of the Gulf states get along, that they realize that their shared objective, the threats that are posed to them collectively, override anything that may fall between them where there's differences. And so he's worked to create peace and stability throughout the Middle East too. Your country should be very proud of that.

QUESTION: Yeah, thank you so much, Mr. Secretary –

SECRETARY POMPEO: Thank you.

QUESTION: – for having us today, and it's such a pleasure and honor to have you today on Kuwait TV.

SECRETARY POMPEO: Thank you very much. I enjoyed it a great deal. It's wonderful to be here.

QUESTION: Thank you, thank you.

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[Press Releases: Amendments to the Terrorist Designations of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria](#)

Media Note
Office of the Spokesperson

Washington, DC
March 21, 2019

The Department of State has amended the terrorist designations of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) to include Amaq News Agency, Al Hayat Media Center, and other aliases. These aliases have been added to ISIS's designation as a Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO) under Section 219 of the Immigration and Nationality Act, and as a Specially Designated Global Terrorist (SDGT) under Executive Order 13224. Additionally the Department of State has reviewed and maintained the FTO designation of ISIS.

Amaq News Agency and Al Hayat Media Center are two media wings of ISIS. Amaq News Agency is part of the terrorist organization's propaganda apparatus, and is used for claiming responsibility for ISIS or ISIS-inspired attacks,

spreading terrorist messages online, and recruitment. Al Hayat Media Center is ISIS's multilingual media outlet and is also used for recruitment purposes.

Today's actions notify the U.S. public and the international community that Amaq News Agency and Al Hayat Media Center are aliases of ISIS. Terrorism designations expose and isolate organizations and individuals, and deny them access to the U.S. financial system. Moreover, designations can assist the law enforcement activities of the United States and other governments.

A list of State Department-designated FTOs and SDGTs is available here: <https://www.state.gov/j/ct/rls/other/des/index.htm>.

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[Press Releases: Briefing With Traveling Press](#)

Special Briefing
Michael R. Pompeo

Secretary of State

David Citadel Hotel
Jerusalem
March 21, 2019

MR PALLADINO: All right. Do we have any questions?

QUESTION: Mr. Secretary.

SECRETARY POMPEO: Yeah.

MR PALLADINO: Please, go ahead.

QUESTION: Thank you. There are reports that the United States is considering recognizing the annexation of the Golan Heights, which would obviously be of enormous strategic value to Israel. Can you give us any insight into where that would stand?

SECRETARY POMPEO: No.

QUESTION: Why not?

QUESTION: Is it being considered?

SECRETARY POMPEO: I don't have anything to say about that.

QUESTION: What is your view toward that? What –

SECRETARY POMPEO: I'm not going to comment. We – the administration's considering lots of things always, and I try to make sure we get to answers before we talk about them publicly.

QUESTION: And could you talk about what the downside of that would be? What would be the risks?

SECRETARY POMPEO: No. I'm just not going to comment on it.

MR PALLADINO: Let's move on. Next question, Barbara, please.

QUESTION: Just on that same idea and the question I've been asking previously, you said yesterday that the policy hasn't changed with regards to whether the U.S. considers the West Bank and Golan occupied territory. Can you just tell – you didn't say what the policy was. What is the policy?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Yeah, so I'm not going to spend time talking about this. I've answered this question previously, and you'd asked yesterday. I'll give you the same answer. Our mission statement in the Human Rights Report is to –

QUESTION: No, it's not the Human Rights Report. Just generally speaking on –

SECRETARY POMPEO: But this is where the language – this is what you're – this is why you're asking. Am I mistaken?

QUESTION: Well, more than that because –

SECRETARY POMPEO: No, but this is where you saw the language, right?

QUESTION: That's what's triggered this round of questioning.

SECRETARY POMPEO: And that's the question I'm going to answer, yeah.

QUESTION: But the use of the term occupied or occupation has been decreasing over time, and when we ask the spokespeople doing the briefings, they always say the policy hasn't changed.

SECRETARY POMPEO: Yes.

QUESTION: So I just would like – it would be helpful for us to get a clear statement of what the policy is with regards to whether the U.S. considers the West Bank and the Golan occupied territory.

SECRETARY POMPEO: I understand the question you're asking. I understand why you're asking the question. We used that language in the Human Rights Report with great intentionality. We didn't make a mistake. It's there for a reason. It's not a change in U.S. policy. It was our intent, as it is in every element of the Human Rights Report, to be as factually descriptive as we can, and that's what we did.

QUESTION: Can I ask –

SECRETARY POMPEO: So it wasn't a mistake; it wasn't an error. It was done knowingly, and we believe we have the most factual actual description that was appropriate for the report.

Yes, sir.

MR PALLADINO: Go ahead, Matt.

QUESTION: Thanks. Slightly different. When you talk about this – what you're going to be doing this afternoon, in terms of going to the wall with the prime minister, you apparently are going to be the highest-ranking foreign official to go there with him. Is that meant to signify anything about Israeli sovereignty over that particular part of the city or not? Is it just a coincidence?

And then looking ahead to tomorrow, can you give us any kind of a preview about just how tough you're going to be on Hizballah and the Iranian role not just in Lebanon but in Syria and Iraq?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Yeah. So the trip to the wall is something that I had talked with Prime Minister Netanyahu about doing some time ago, and it's our first chance to go there together. I think it's important. I think it's symbolic that a senior American official go there with the prime minister of Israel. It's a place that's important to many faiths, and I'm looking forward to it. I think it'll be – I think I'll be very special.

With respect to the trip tomorrow, Hizballah is a terrorist organization. So when you ask how tough I'm going to be, we're going to –

QUESTION: But it's also part of the government.

SECRETARY POMPEO: No, it's a terrorist organization – period, full stop. These are – this is an organization underwritten by the Islamic Republic of Iran with the intention of the destruction of Israel and, if you listen to them closely, the destruction of Western democracy, including the United States of America as well. Maybe that answers your question about how tough I'm going to be. (Laughter.) But there's – we –

QUESTION: Well, that sounds like you're not to mince words, clearly. You're going to be on their home turf, and so that's –

SECRETARY POMPEO: We're going to be very clear about how America sees Hizballah and our expectations about how Lebanon's success depends on – the Lebanese people will demand that a terrorist organization not be in control of their government and not drive policies and create risk for their country as well. We all know the risk, right? Hizballah does something inside of Lebanon; the risk of escalation is real. The people of Lebanon don't want that. The people of Israel don't want that. The people of the United States of America don't want that. And we're going to make that abundantly clear, and then we're going to make sure that they have all the information we have about this as well.

MR PALLADINO: AFP, Francesco.

QUESTION: Thanks. Mr. Secretary, to follow on Matt's question on the wall, if it's important and special that a U.S. official goes there with the Israeli prime minister, why is it the first time? Why wasn't it the case for President Trump or Vice President Pence? Is this an evolution in the relationship and how you see the Western Wall?

SECRETARY POMPEO: I don't know. I don't know why they didn't go there before. I can't answer that.

QUESTION: It's not an evolution in the U.S. stance towards Israel and –

SECRETARY POMPEO: I'm looking forward to going to the wall with the prime minister.

MR PALLADINO: CBN, David.

QUESTION: Secretary Pompeo, anti-Semitism and the Democrats, did some of that come up with Prime Minister Netanyahu? And can you kind of term – give us a sense of what was discussed about the concern he has, you have, on that?

SECRETARY POMPEO: We didn't talk about it in terms of U.S. – I don't want to give – I try to stay away from conversations we have privately, but I will say we didn't talk about U.S. domestic politics. For that matter, I'm sure of your next question. We didn't talk about Israeli internal politics either. (Laughter.)

We did talk about anti-Semitism, that I made some remarks yesterday about it. It is a growing threat in Europe and around the world and something that this administration takes incredibly seriously and something that presents increasing risk not only to Jews but to all of us.

MR PALLADINO: *New York Times*, Ed.

QUESTION: The prime minister said yesterday that the two of you spoke about additional ways to apply pressure to Iran. Can you elaborate on that?

SECRETARY POMPEO: I won't say what we talked about, but each of the pillars that we have – each of the vectors we've used to put back – push back against them, the sanctions that are in place – we have another decision about waivers that'll be coming up in 60 days, I guess it is, the beginning of May.

The sanctions regime that we've put in place for designating those connected to Iranian malign activity, wherever we find them, including in places like Iraq. You would have seen that recently we designated an organization inside of Iraq, which we had not done before. Our cooperation with Israel, our attempts to deny the Iranians the resources to continue to foment terror. We're going to continue to increase the pressure we're applying along each of those vectors of pressure.

Remember the simple goal. The simple goal is to get Iran to behave like a normal nation: stop blowing up things around the world; stop fomenting terrorism; stop their assassination campaign in Europe; stop underwriting the Houthis, Hamas, Hizballah. Simple things – the same things we ask every nation in the world to do we're asking of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

MR PALLADINO: *LA Times*, Tracy.

QUESTION: Thank you. President Rivlin this morning spoke to you about the Palestinians as a very important issue, and he even raised the idea of Israel having to take care of the Palestinians if the Palestinian Authority were to collapse. Is that something the United States is now thinking about, how to take – how to help Israel take care of the Palestinians?

SECRETARY POMPEO: You have to put this in context, right, of the larger U.S. Middle East policy and what we're trying to accomplish. I've been talking about this since I – since almost the beginning of my time as Secretary of State. The conflict between the Israelis and the Palestinians is a component of that, right? These threats that I just talked about in Iran, these are all pieces of it. The work that we're doing in Syria, the Defeat ISIS coalition that we built up – these are all elements of the Trump administration's policy in the Middle East.

With respect to the particular question there, look, the Israelis and Palestinians live side-by-side. We need to help them figure out how to do that. And that's what I think the president was pointing to. He and I had a chance to talk about that a little bit more. It's a fact, and this administration wishes well for the Palestinian people.

QUESTION: But not necessarily a two-state solution, right?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Yeah, we want the Palestinian people, whether they live in the West Bank or in Gaza or, frankly, Palestinians that live anywhere in the world – I mean, think about where we are, where we're sitting today. We're sitting in a country that has Christians, Jews, Muslims all living in a democracy.

This is unique and special and what we would hope for broader parts of the Middle East as well. It's a – this is an amazing, unique place in which we're sitting. And so you asked this question in the context of the Palestinians. We hope they have a brighter future as well, and as you see us lay out our plans over the coming months, I think you'll see that very clearly.

MR PALLADINO: Question? Let's go ABC, Conor.

QUESTION: You mentioned before we arrived in Kuwait that one of the things you'd focus on while here would be Syria. There have been some reports that SDF forces have taken the final square kilometers of territory.

SECRETARY POMPEO: Yeah.

QUESTION: Are you ready to declare the end of the ISIS caliphate?

SECRETARY POMPEO: We're close. People – there's – it's an amazing accomplishment that the coalition achieved there. I'm incredibly proud of having been a small part of continuing to build that coalition out and the work that United States did, Department of Defense did, that the folks fighting down the Euphrates River valley did. The threat from radical Islamic terrorism remains. We need to finish out the last few square meters there in Syria. Still work to do.

MR PALLADINO: One more. *New York Times*, Ed.

QUESTION: Can you give us a preview of the conversations that might take place between the prime minister and President Trump next week? What will be at the top of the agenda?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Oh, goodness, I think it'll be the same set of things I came here to help prepare for their meeting. I think it'll be the same set of issues, right: the great relationship between our two countries, the critical nature of that relationship, our common threats from terrorism, including terrorism that emanates from the Islamic Republic of Iran. I would guess those would be the issues that will dominate their conversation.

MR PALLADINO: NBC, Andrea.

QUESTION: Can you share whether you, in your conversation with the crown prince that was the day before yesterday, if my time is – did you discuss the women who were arrested? There have been reports of torture involving al-Qahtani, in fact, his close aide – Khashoggi – were any of those human rights issues more broadly discussed in that conversation?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Yeah, it was actually a pretty short conversation. I had a couple of specific things I wanted to talk to him about, but never a conversation goes by where we don't talk about the human rights issues broadly, those in Saudi Arabia as well.

QUESTION: And the investigation, are they getting any closer to (inaudible) clearing it up for you?

SECRETARY POMPEO: There's still work to do. We are still keenly interested in making sure that all the facts come to bear and are brought, and that not only do the Saudis handle this properly inside the country, but that we get the information that we need so that we can make good decisions for the United States government as well as we continue to honor the commitment we have made since the beginning, which is that we will follow the facts to wherever they go.

MR PALLADINO: BBC, Barbara.

QUESTION: Mr. Netanyahu has been criticized by some elements in Israel and also amongst American Jews about aligning himself with the extremist right wing here in Israel ahead of the elections. Have you – does that concern you and have you expressed any concern about that?

SECRETARY POMPEO: I'm going to stay far away from the decisions that the Israeli people will make here in a few weeks. It wouldn't be appropriate for the U.S. Secretary of State to comment on Israeli domestic politics.

QUESTION: In that line – oh, sorry.

MR PALLADINO: Go ahead, please.

QUESTION: I'm sorry. In that line, though –

SECRETARY POMPEO: Go ahead. Yes, ma'am.

QUESTION: – you spoke of Israel being this great democracy where everyone's living freely.

SECRETARY POMPEO: Yeah.

QUESTION: It's not the elections; what about the law that they passed that this is only a Jewish state?

SECRETARY POMPEO: The Israelis will have – this is Israeli domestic politics. I must say, as I stare around the world at democracies, this is pretty close to the top of the list, right? When you see the freedom, the pluralism, the ability to jostle, to ensure that rights are protected, Israel is something that the world can look up to in terms of its democratic values and institutions. I'm very comfortable saying that.

We don't get it right in the United States every day either, but this is what our republic, their democracy, does. We have competitive elections. People get to make judgments about their leaders – in our case, every couple years or every four years for our president; in Israel's case, their elections are timed differently. But in each case, these are places where the people get to have their voices heard on a recurring basis, and when they don't like the direction of travel of their nation, they can change it.

MR PALLADINO: Last question. CBN, David.

QUESTION: Has there been a narrative, Secretary Pompeo, that has frustrated you from what is dubbed the "mainstream media," whether it be U.S. policy or Middle East policy or what's been reported? Is there a story – not necessarily that's not being told, but you feel frustrated over at all when you see headlines and certain articles written?

SECRETARY POMPEO: I'm going to just pass on that. (Laughter.)

QUESTION: Thank you.

SECRETARY POMPEO: But I must say, I'm not prone to frustration.

QUESTION: Why's that?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Because you – I'm a deep believer in our republic, and my task as the Secretary of State is to get up every day and drive towards achieving the mission that President Trump lays out for me. The Constitution that I'm sworn to defend and uphold, I work at it every day. I'm very focused on the mission. There'll be critiques from all across the political spectrum. I'm not immune to reading them. My son makes sure I don't miss the good ones. (Laughter.)

But my mission set is clear, and I'm – if we have a story to tell, if we have a thing that's important for you all to know, it's our task to make sure that we share that and we communicate what we're doing and why we're trying to do it. And we certainly have constraints on what we can say and what we can't from time to time, but our mission is to make sure that the American people understand what it is President Trump's trying to deliver, and how it is he's trying to deliver that for the American people.

QUESTION: As a matter of faith, can you just say –

MR PALLADINO: We need stop there. I'm sorry. We're out time, Mr. Secretary.

QUESTION: – how important to you the events –

SECRETARY POMPEO: I'll take one more, and then I'll go.

MR PALLADINO: Okay.

QUESTION: As a matter of faith, can you just say how important the events here in Jerusalem are to you? You're going to be seeing the Church of the Holy Sepulchre and the Wailing Wall and so on. What does it mean to you?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Yeah, so I don't know. I've been to Israel now a whole handful of times. I came here the first time as a private citizen, long before I entered Congress, brought my son here, because I wanted him to see this place that had a special meaning for the people of my faith of Christianity. We had a chance to see most of the main Christian sights and travel up north to the Sea of Galilee and see the Christian sights up there as well.

So each time I get a chance to come back and see the history and remind myself of the – of this place that you read about in the Bible, it's of enormous value to me personally. It always reminds me of the spirituality that I hope informs many of the things that I do, trying to fulfill my mission to the Constitution and on behalf of America and President Trump.

MR PALLADINO: Thank you, Mr. Secretary.

SECRETARY POMPEO: Thank you all very much.

QUESTION: Thank you.

MR PALLADINO: The embargo is lifted.

SECRETARY POMPEO: Yeah. You all have a good day.

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