

Press Releases: Interview With Pirkko Pontinen of YLE TV1

Interview
Michael R. Pompeo

Secretary of State

Lappi Arena
Rovaniemi, Finland
May 6, 2019

QUESTION: Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, thank you for this opportunity to meet and make an interview with the Finnish Broadcasting Company.

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

QUESTION: Thank you so much. The last time you were in Finland, it was last July for a summit for President Trump and Putin. And that time you also met your Russian counterpart, Sergey Lavrov. It was the first time, but is it right it will be the second time now when you will meet him face to face?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Yeah, I think I've run into him in other forums before, but this will be the second time that we've had the opportunity to meet here in Finland.

QUESTION: How do you describe your personal relationship to Mr. Lavrov when you keep in mind that the current tensions between your country and Russia? How is it working with him?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Well, we talk often on the phone. I'd say we've met a handful of times. The conversations are always very direct, they're very professional, each of us doing our level best to represent what our leaders are asking us to do. Our relationship is just fine.

QUESTION: And you have a lot of topics to talk about. Just in your talk just moments ago, you talked about Arctic waters and area, and about the commercial purposes and also the military purposes. And you had very strong words towards especially China, but also towards Russia, now when Russia is under international sanctions and basically there is no cooperation between your country and Russia anymore. So how do you – being – the U.S. can be aware of what Russia is doing on Arctic area now when the relations are very tense?

SECRETARY POMPEO: I think we have a deep understanding of what Russia's doing here. It's visible; you can see it. Our presence here, we see the actions they're taking. Our national security team makes sure that we do the work to track their actions here as well. We want every nation to have the opportunity to participate in the great things that can be here in the Arctic region. We want fair and open markets, we want free transit, we want the rule of law. Each of those are things we want. What we don't want is countries like Russia using military power to deny passage for ships that have a right to pass, and to ban things that are inconsistent with international law. If there are good neighbors here in the Arctic region and if Russia becomes one of them, we would welcome that.

QUESTION: But your words were not the same towards –

SECRETARY POMPEO: Well, you can – we can see the behavior. I mean, we should also – and when I speak with Foreign Minister Lavrov, I'll be clear about this too – we're demanding that they behave according to the rule of law. It's pretty straightforward. It's the same thing we ask Finland to do. It's no different.

QUESTION: But you didn't have the same words towards China. Actually, you were – if I understood, you were – you have very strong rules against China, and you like to limit its presence in the Arctic waters. So you see China as a threat in this area?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Well, China is not an Arctic nation. There are many non-Arctic nations. China should receive no special status. There are Arctic nations, and non-Arctic nations. Different sets of rules necessarily will apply. You'll have entitlements under the Law of the Sea; there are lots of rules that apply to those who are in the region. But what we do want to make sure is there is free and fair and open navigation, and China is welcome to participate in that. And if they are prepared to come up here and invest commercially on a straight, transparent basis using private enterprise to do so, but not as a façade, not coming up here ostensibly as a commercial entity but creating a debt trap for countries so that they can ultimately foreclose and seize that property – those are the kind of behaviors we've seen in other parts of the world, and the Arctic is too important to let that happen.

QUESTION: So would you like a – are you saying that the United States would like to change the role of the Arctic Council from environmental issues towards these military and strategic – I'm sorry, I can't pronounce – questions, more of that – more on that side?

SECRETARY POMPEO: We can do it – we can do it all. It's not – one doesn't have to choose one over the other. Indeed, they are related, right? If we don't get this – the security piece right, then the capacity to do all the great things we want on environmental issues and other issues will all be lost. So it's not possible to simply focus on one without the other, nor is there any necessity to do so. I'm convinced we can do all of that. This Arctic Council is an important organization. It's small, it's nimble, it's eight countries. I am confident we can find ways to cooperate together for the betterment of this region.

QUESTION: One of the topics you will – if we are – we have been informed is Venezuela, which you are going to talk with Mr. Lavrov, and now Russia and United States have opposite views of who will be in the head of the country. So is it so that a solution in Venezuela is not anymore in the hands of Venezuelan people?

SECRETARY POMPEO: No, just the opposite. No, this decision is being made by the Venezuelan people each and every day. They held an election. Their constitution required that the National Assembly select an interim president when a fraudulent election was held. They did so. They elected Juan Guaido. The Venezuelan people are speaking. They're demanding democracy. They're demanding that their country not be hijacked by a socialist and by Cubans, who have destroyed their economy. You have children starving in the streets of Venezuela. That is not acceptable to Venezuelan people, and the Organization of American States, the Lima Group, 54 countries are all joined together to help that poor child that is starving. That's the mission set.

QUESTION: But anyway, that's one of the questions you will have with Mr. Lavrov. So what are you discussing about?

SECRETARY POMPEO: I'm sure we'll talk about a range – a broad range of subjects. It won't surprise me if Venezuela comes up.

QUESTION: And the very last question, which is in – we Finns are very much interested in is concerns of the icebreakers. It is not easy for State Department, it's more for Homeland Security.

SECRETARY POMPEO: Right.

QUESTION: But does State Department support the deal to buy possibly six more new icebreakers from Finland?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Right, we have one right now –

QUESTION: Yeah, only one.

SECRETARY POMPEO: – ready to commence construction, five more to go after that, and the State Department is fully supportive. I hope we can do them quickly.

QUESTION: Can you say anything more? Is that all that's (inaudible)?

SECRETARY POMPEO: In terms of timing?

QUESTION: Mm-hmm.

SECRETARY POMPEO: No, I don't know that the timing is set for the follow-ons, but the Department of Homeland Security and the State Department are all on board with doing this just as quickly as we can. We think it's incredibly important and we want to get it done.

QUESTION: Thank you, Secretary of State.

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

QUESTION: Thank you, sir.

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Press Releases: Panama Elections

Press Statement
Morgan Ortagus

Department Spokesperson

Washington, DC
May 6, 2019

The people of the United States commend the people of Panama for exercising their right to vote in free and fair national elections, a sure sign of their thriving democracy. We extend our warmest congratulations to Laurentino Cortizo on his election as the next president of the Republic of Panama.

The United States and Panama share strong ties, tested by time and regional challenges, and built on respect for common values. Panama has proven to be a regional democratic leader, an economic success, and a steadfast partner. We value our deep, long-standing friendship and our shared commitments to transparency and human rights. We look forward to working with the Cortizo administration to advance our common goals.

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Press Releases: Turkish Drilling in Cypriot-claimed Waters

Press Statement
Morgan Ortagus

Department Spokesperson

Washington, DC
May 5, 2019

The United States is deeply concerned by Turkey's announced intentions to begin offshore drilling operations in an area claimed by the Republic of Cyprus as its Exclusive Economic Zone. This step is highly provocative and risks raising tensions in the region. We urge Turkish authorities to halt these operations and encourage all parties to act with restraint.

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Press Releases: Rocket Attacks on Israel

Press Statement
Morgan Ortagus

Department Spokesperson

Washington, DC
May 4, 2019

The United States strongly condemns the ongoing barrage of rocket attacks by Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad from Gaza upon innocent civilians and their communities across Israel. We call on those responsible for the violence to cease this aggression immediately. We stand with Israel and fully support its right to self defense against these abhorrent attacks.

As noted in the State Department Travel Advisory, U.S. citizens should exercise caution and remain alert to emergency situations.

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[Press Releases: Interview With Ben Shapiro of The Ben Shapiro Show](#)

Interview
Michael R. Pompeo

Secretary of State

Via Teleconference
May 2, 2019

QUESTION: Welcome back. This is the Ben Shapiro Show. We're obviously

watching with bated breath everything that is happening in Venezuela, where a standoff seems to have ensued between Juan Guaido, the legitimate leader of Venezuela, and the socialist dictator of Venezuela, the evil dictator, Nicolas Maduro.

Joining us on the line to discuss all of this is Secretary of State Mike Pompeo. Secretary Pompeo, thanks so much for joining the Ben Shapiro Show.

SECRETARY POMPEO: Ben, it's great to be with you today.

QUESTION: So, Secretary, why don't we start with the current situation as you know it in Venezuela. What is the latest on the ground? What's happening over there?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Well, you have to back up just for first principles. You have a country devastated from years and years of socialist thuggery, an economy that can't support feeding children, medicine for kids. And this has now culminated in the Venezuelan people using their constitutional authority to get to a place where we now have a new leader, Juan Guaido, and he is doing battle against Maduro. And what we saw this week was a demonstration of the absence of the ability of Maduro to control his own government. You saw them bring forces into the streets. Everyone has seen those videos. And we've also seen senior leaders inside what is the Maduro-led rump former government all begin to waver, and all begin to talk about how it is they'll get out of the country, who's going to get the golden tickets, how are they going to get out.

We saw that Maduro himself was preparing to depart the country. Over time, Maduro has no capacity to govern. He may get to rule for a little while, but at the end of the day democracy will be restored in Venezuela and the Venezuelan people will have an opportunity to rid themselves of the Cubans, to rid themselves of the Russians, and restore democracy to this nation that has the capacity to be incredibly wealthy and incredibly democratic.

QUESTION: Well, Secretary Pompeo, as you mentioned at the very end there, the Russians and the Cubans have been heavily involved in Venezuela. I'm frankly bewildered by the media's suggestion – and many members of the Democratic Party – that the United States should stay out in, what, deference to Russia and Cuba? Can you explain to folks how deep the intervention of the Russians and Cubans is in Venezuela right now?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Ben, I kind of laugh sometimes. You'll hear people saying we need to make sure there's not an invasion in Venezuela, and yet there's been one. I mean, it took place. The Cubans invaded some time ago; the Russians have now followed suit. The numbers of Cubans in the security apparatus alone are in the thousands. The Russians have people working over there in the hundreds, if not more. These are the folks who are actually controlling the direction of travel for Venezuela. We've seen that failure even today. It's largely Cuban security forces that are protecting Maduro in his hiding place. He talked yesterday about having nerves of steel. That's easier to do when you're surrounded by Cuban military people and you're hiding in a bunker.

They are deep. They've controlled the economy; they have looted the nation. They've demanded that Venezuela provide to Cuba essentially discount oil for years and years, harming the Venezuelan people. The Cubans have been there and are deeply embedded, have been for years, and the Russians have been there as well, largely protecting their economic interests.

QUESTION: Secretary Pompeo, one of the criticisms that has been – or levied against the American government has been made by people, including Representative Ilhan Omar of Minnesota, who have suggested – many people on the left seem to be suggesting that American sanctions – that America bears responsibility for the situation in Venezuela. I was hoping maybe you could debunk this silly myth that it was American sanctions that led to the collapse of civil society in Venezuela.

SECRETARY POMPEO: Ben, there's always elements of – in the United States that are the blame-America-first crowd. This is factually unfounded in the most troubling way. It's deeply disturbing that someone would say something like that. The challenges that face the Venezuelan people today are years and years in the making, long before American sanctions were put in place months and months ago, whether that was putting military individuals in charge of their oil wealth – the largest known substantiated oil reserves in the world belong to Venezuela. Not the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, not the United States, not Russia, but Venezuela, and they put a general in charge, and of course it falls into disrepair. The corruption, the kleptocracy, is legion, and that all long predates Americans' effort – America's effort to build out a 54-nation coalition to restore democracy. To suggest that the troubles – when there are 200 metric tons of food sitting on the Venezuelan border that came from the taxpayers of the United States of America through our good graces – to suggest somehow that America is remotely connected to the harm befalling the Venezuelan people is sick and dangerous.

QUESTION: We're speaking with Secretary of State Mike Pompeo.

Secretary Pompeo, now there's been a lot of controversy surrounding comments by you, members of the administration, suggesting that all options, including possible military intervention, are on the table with regard to Venezuela. Where do we stand on that, and what is the position of the administration with regard to the possibility of military intervention in Venezuela?

SECRETARY POMPEO: The President has been unambiguous. He talked last night about – or the night before last about how we're going to approach the Cubans, the challenges, the costs that we're going to impose on Cuban leadership such that they depart Venezuela, but has also made very, very clear that military action is something that we are prepared to use that is an option.

I'm the Secretary of State. We are doing – using all of our diplomatic and political tools to try and resolve this crisis in a way that is peaceful to restore democracy in a way that creates the least violent situation with the least persons injured and harmed. But I think the Venezuelan people are demanding. I think it is morally correct to make sure that in the event that we can find no other way, that American use of military power is something we

will simply not rule out.

QUESTION: So I was hoping that maybe you could express the American interest in Venezuela. So I've heard people on the isolationist right as well as the isolationist and progressive left suggesting that America doesn't really tremendous interests in Venezuela. Why should the American people care about what's happening in Venezuela other than the simple humanitarian concern for suffering people?

SECRETARY POMPEO: First, I think that's significant in its own right, but there are certainly additional reasons that America cares deeply about restoring democracy to Venezuela. We need other democratic nations that are prepared to engage and freely trade. The risk from migrants we see today in Colombia, numbering in the 1.5 million, the risk of migrants moving, leaving those places, having to leave their homes, is real.

America also has a deep interest in ensuring that countries that are adverse to the United States, who are desirous of putting America at risk – countries like Cuba, countries like Russia – don't continue to have the foothold that they have literally hundreds of miles from our shores. I don't want to get in too much detail, but their capacity to know what's going on here in the United States, to use that platform to hold Americans at risk, is something that's simply not acceptable and would be deeply adverse to the United States' interests.

QUESTION: We're speaking with Secretary of State Mike Pompeo.

Secretary Pompeo, I want to switch topics for just a moment and talk about the situation in Yemen. Obviously, there's a lot of controversy surrounding America's involvement in Yemen. Again, the big question that is raised is: Why should Americans care about what happens in Yemen? Why should we be expending any efforts on behalf of the Saudi government, for example, in Yemen in the middle of what seems to be an internecine warfare – internecine war between Sunni and Shia? So what is the situation in Yemen? And the President has made pretty obvious his interest in being involved. Why should America be involved in Yemen?

SECRETARY POMPEO: So were this a simple civil war in Yemen, it would be difficult to justify America having any involvement, but sadly, that's not the case. This is terrain in which al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula exists. They have some of their most sophisticated capability at performing operations that are external. That is, external planning groups are sitting in parts of Yemen today. We have an obligation to protect America, to take down that al-Qaida terrorist threat that is on inside of Yemen.

Moreover, we have the Iranians using Yemen as a platform, a platform to hold ships transiting through the strait and around and through the waters that surround Yemen, both to the south of Yemen and to the west of Yemen, holding American ships, ships sailing through those seas, at risk. We also have Iranian platforms, unarmed – unmanned, armed aerial vehicles as well as missile systems launching missiles into Riyadh and into the Emirates, where Americans travel frequently. There are real security risks. The Saudis have a

unambiguous right to defend themselves from attacks out of Yemen, and it is not the Houthis but rather the Iranians that are responsible for that.

QUESTION: My final question for you, Secretary Pompeo, because I know you have to run. Obviously, you're a busy man. I wanted to ask you about the reports of a dramatic rise in anti-Semitism across the world. Today, of course, marks *Yom HaShoah*, Holocaust Remembrance Day. I was wondering if you had any words on the threat to Jews both in the United States as well as internationally in the midst of what seems to be a radical rise in anti-Semitism from a lot of different sides of various aisles.

SECRETARY POMPEO: Ben, you have that right. Anti-Semitism can come from a number of directions, and sadly, it is indeed on the rise. It's on the rise in Europe. You see the Corbynites, the Corbyn folks in the United Kingdom. You see the risk in France, and sadly, here in the United States as well. We all know the history, and we each have an individual obligation to do all that we can to push back, certainly against the violence, and keeping people secure and safe, but also against the rhetoric, against the language, the anti-Semitic language that can be used, which causes others to engage in that violence. It's deeply troubling to see this rise. I've spoken about this with great frequency. The President has as well. We're determined to push back against it not only here in the United States of America but around the world as well.

QUESTION: Well, Secretary Pompeo, thank you so much for your time. I really appreciate, obviously, all your hard work. The world's a dangerous place, and we need people like you making sure that the policy is done right. Thanks so much for your time, Secretary Pompeo.

SECRETARY POMPEO: That's very kind, Ben. Thank you, sir. Have a good day. So long.

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