

Press Releases: Secretary Pompeo's Meeting With Gudlaugur Thor Thordarson, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Iceland

Media Note
Office of the Spokesperson

Washington, DC
January 7, 2019

Michael R. Pompeo, Secretary of State of the United States, and Gudlaugur Thor Thordarson, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Iceland, met in Washington, DC, on January 7, 2019, and issued the following joint statement:

Begin text:

The United States and Iceland have for decades enjoyed a very close relationship including in security and defense, Arctic affairs, trade and investment, culture, education, and people-to-people connections. This has contributed to stability and prosperity in the North Atlantic region.

The changing strategic environment in the North Atlantic and the Arctic reinforces the importance of the longstanding security relationship between the United States and Iceland. Accordingly, we will enhance our consultations and cooperation within NATO and in maintaining the bilateral Defense Agreement.

The United States has become Iceland's largest bilateral trading partner, and U.S. travelers are the single largest group of visitors to Iceland. There is, however, still unrealized potential for trade in our commercial relationship, and the United States and Iceland will explore possibilities for improving conditions for bilateral trade and investment.

Iceland will shortly assume the chairmanship of the Arctic Council and will work closely with the United States and other member states in furthering cooperation in the region.

The Office of Website Management, Bureau of Public Affairs, manages this site as a portal for information from the U.S. State Department. External links to other Internet sites should not be construed as an endorsement of the views or privacy policies contained therein.

[Press Releases: Interview With Wilfred Frost of CNBC](#)

Interview

Michael R. Pompeo

Secretary of State

Washington, DC

January 7, 2019

QUESTION: Mr. Secretary, thank you for having me. It's a privilege to be with you today.

SECRETARY POMPEO: Wilfred, great to see you again.

QUESTION: So you're traveling off to the Middle East this afternoon to give reassurance to your allies in the region. Reassurance about what specifically?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Well, it's not so much reassurance. We're traveling, we'll visit eight or nine countries along the way to share with them a couple ideas. First – and they know this: America is there. We're there to continue to do the things that need to be done to protect the American people and to ensure Middle East stability.

Second: There's been a lot of noise about this withdrawal from Syria, and we want to make sure they understand completely what that means. There's no change in our commitment to the defeat of the caliphate or of ISIS globally. There's no change in our counter-Iran strategy. America is still committed to taking down the malign influence that the Islamic of Iran – that those activities – the risks that those activities present to the world. There's no change. It's a change in tactics – we're going to withdraw our 2,000 soldiers from Syria – but the mission, the purpose for which we have been involved for the 24 months in the administration, remains in full. That's why we're

heading there. We're going to continue to build up the alliances with those partners in ways that are very important for the security of the American people.

QUESTION: I guess some of your allies in the region are a little more nervous than others. How sure are you – to use your own words, sir – that the Turks won't slaughter the Kurds?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Well, President Erdogan made a commitment to President Trump as the two of them were discussing what this ought to look like; that the Turks would continue the counter-ISIS campaign after our departure, and that the Turks would ensure that the folks that we'd fought with, that had assisted us in the counter-ISIS campaign would be protected. That's why Ambassador Bolton is there later today or tomorrow, to have a conversation with the Turks about how we will effectuate that in light of the U.S. withdrawal.

QUESTION: Do you trust President Erdogan personally? It seems that President Trump has gone from considering him friend to foe back to friend again in fairly quick succession.

SECRETARY POMPEO: Look, my sense in all of these things in my world internationally is it's about acts on the ground, it's about actions, it's what we actually do. Commitments are important and then making sure that we follow through on those commitments matters an awful lot. That's true for lots of parties, including our NATO ally, Turkey.

QUESTION: You mentioned you're visiting lots of countries – Jordan, Egypt, Bahrain, UAE, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Oman, Kuwait. Is this the anti-Iran tour?

SECRETARY POMPEO: So again, it – we want great things for the Iranian people. That's been the mission of President Trump's administration. We want the Iranian people to have a voice and to be able to control their own leadership, to take the revolutionary activity of Iran and stop the risk associated with it – the risk to the world and, frankly, the risk that comes with all the money and lives that have been spent by the Iranian people to effectuate these policies that we don't think are in line with what the Iranian people really want.

And so an element of this trip is absolutely to continue to build up the coalition – the coalition that includes Gulf states, the coalition that includes Israel, the coalition that includes European countries and Asian countries all around the world that understand that the world's largest state sponsor of terrorism needs to cease that activity.

QUESTION: Would you like to see your European allies back your hardline on Iran more vociferously than they have?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Absolutely. I'd like to see everyone in the world continue to assist the United States and the Gulf states and Israel in this effort. It's an important campaign and the revolutionary nature of the Iranian regime presents a real risk to the entire world.

QUESTION: I want to move on and talk about China. Mr. Secretary, has the trade war with China impacted your job, made it harder? Has it hurt diplomacy?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Trade is an element of what it is that we do. So we have many challenges that were identified in the President's National Security Strategy on China. Trade is certainly amongst them, but we're making progress there. I hope we continue to make progress, and I hope too that we'll make progress on all of the other places where China is not behaving in the way we wish it would, whether that's their cyber activity that has had a real impact, whether that's the theft of intellectual property, which has hurt American businesses. All of these things and trade on top of it are part of what U.S. diplomats are confronted with each day, and so it's been a part of our conversation for our entire time in office.

QUESTION: Is China's cyber capability stronger than the U.S.'s?

SECRETARY POMPEO: I don't think there's anyone that rivals U.S. capacity to deliver whatever dimension of global power is needed. That's certainly the case in cyber as well.

QUESTION: And when it comes to North Korea, is full denuclearization possible before the trade dispute is settled, or are those two issues linked together?

SECRETARY POMPEO: The Chinese have been very clear to us that these are separate issues. Their behavior has demonstrated that as well, and we appreciate that. China has actually been a good partner in our effort to reduce the risk to the world from North Korea's nuclear capability. I expect they will continue to do so.

QUESTION: I wanted to move on and talk about Brexit. Your ambassador to London last week, Ambassador Johnson, said that the UK was, quote, "in need of leadership" on Brexit. Is that the official State Department view of Theresa May's handling of Brexit?

SECRETARY POMPEO: We've been pretty clear from the beginning the UK people made a sovereign decision with respect to Brexit. We respect that. We do hope that between – as between the EU and the UK, they can come to an agreement so that there aren't negative ramifications that flow. Negative ramifications from a hard Brexit related to not only commerce and trade, but importantly to the national security issues that we have with the British as well as with the European Union. Those are important national security concerns, and so I'm hopeful that all the leaders – the leaders in the EU, the leaders in the United Kingdom – will find a way to come together to make sure that this transition is effective.

QUESTION: You made a speech to Brussels – in Brussels 4th of December. And you said, quote, "Our mission is to reassert our sovereignty... we want our friends to help us and to exert their sovereignty as well." As I said, a speech to Brussels no less. Does that suggest that a fuller version of Brexit is something you think is sensible for the UK?

SECRETARY POMPEO: So the speech wasn't aimed at any particular action. Brexit was a small part of the remarks that I gave. What was really important about that is we do think it's an absolute imperative that multilateral organizations – whether that's the United Nations or the International Criminal Courts – are effective at delivering what their stated missions were. That goes for all of these organizations, the EU included. They need to be sure in every instance that the purpose for which they were intended, taking care of the people that they are deemed – that they have been entrusted to protect and to serve are actually protected and served by those entities. That's what the remarks were about. It is about making sure that nation-states exercise their sovereignty for the good of their own people.

QUESTION: I just wanted to touch back in the Middle East and ask about Saudi Arabia, and whether or not oil prices being low has affected the sort of level of rebuke you've placed on Saudi Arabia for the Khashoggi murder. If oil prices rose again, would you and the President up the ante somewhat?

SECRETARY POMPEO: They're disconnected. We've taken a very clear message to the world with respect to the murder of Jamal Khashoggi. This was a heinous act, it's unacceptable, it's inconsistent with the way nations ought to behave around the world. We've told the Saudis that. We've held Saudi citizens accountable for the murder of Jamal Khashoggi. We will continue to do so as new facts arise. And at the same time, we're going to continue to do the things that protect the American people, and that includes a deep and lasting relationship with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

QUESTION: Just to round things off, Mr. Secretary – I mean, has the shutdown made your job a lot harder?

SECRETARY POMPEO: No. No. Look, the State Department operates in difficult conditions all around the world. I hope the shutdown will end because I just think it's better, but we have an important goal there, the administration has an important goal there that the President's trying to achieve. But the State Department will continue to perform its functions around the world in a way that keeps the American citizens safe and performs its diplomatic function. We'll do that no matter what's thrown at us.

QUESTION: And just – I mean, with the shutdown itself, with the Democrats taking control of the House, the departures of the likes of General Kelly and General Mattis, has there been a sense of pressure in the administration? Has it been the toughest couple of months yet since you've been in your role?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Every day is tough. (Laughter.) And I expect every day going forward will be difficult as well. It's a complicated world. America is an important player all across the globe. We're doing well, we're performing our mission, and the team here at the State Department is prepared to continue to do that throughout 2019.

QUESTION: Mr. Secretary, I appreciate your time. Thank you very much.

SECRETARY POMPEO: Thank you very much, Wilfred. Wonderful to be with you.

The Office of Website Management, Bureau of Public Affairs, manages this site as a portal for information from the U.S. State Department. External links to other Internet sites should not be construed as an endorsement of the views or privacy policies contained therein.

Press Releases: Swearing in of Venezuela's New National Assembly President

Press Statement
Robert Palladino

Deputy Spokesperson

Washington, DC
January 5, 2019

Today the United States celebrates the swearing-in of the new Executive Board of Venezuela's National Assembly led by Deputy Juan Guaidó as its President. Chargé d'Affaires James Story attended this important event. The National Assembly is the only legitimate and last remaining democratically elected institution that truly represents the will of the Venezuelan people. This democratic transition is a powerful confirmation of the National Assembly's unity and commitment to the Venezuelan people above all personal and political concerns.

The National Assembly should inspire hope in the Venezuelan people for a peaceful, prosperous, and democratic future, even as the corrupt and authoritarian Maduro regime and its allies seek to deny Venezuelans that right. The United States stands with the National Assembly and all democratic actors in Venezuela in their commitment to defend democracy, human rights, and the 1999 Constitution. We join their call for a democratic solution that returns Venezuela to democracy, stability, and prosperity.

We thank all those nations that have stepped forward to applaud the National Assembly's peaceful transition and rebuke Nicolas Maduro and his brutal regime through economic and diplomatic initiatives. Every nation must take strong action to help the Venezuelan people reclaim their democracy.

The Office of Website Management, Bureau of Public Affairs, manages this site as a portal for information from the U.S. State Department. External links to other Internet sites should not be construed as an endorsement of the views or privacy policies contained therein.

[Press Releases: Senior State Department Officials Previewing Secretary Pompeo's Upcoming Trip to the Middle East](#)

Special Briefing
Senior State Department Officials
Via Teleconference
January 4, 2019

MODERATOR: Thank you and good morning, everyone. Thank you for joining us today for this background call to preview Secretary Pompeo's upcoming trip to Amman, Cairo, Manama, Abu Dhabi, Doha, Riyadh, Muscat, and Kuwait City.

We are joined today by [Senior State Department Official One]. He will be referred to as Senior State Department Official Number One.

We have [Senior State Department Official Two]. He will be referred to as Senior State Department Official Number Two.

[Senior State Department Official Three], he will be referred to as Senior State Department Official Number Three.

And [Senior State Department Official Four], who will be referred to as Senior State Department Official Four.

As a reminder, today's call is on background and will be embargoed until the conclusion of the call. With that, I'm happy to turn it over to our senior State Department officials to give a brief outline of each stop in the order of each – of the trip itinerary. We'll start with an overview of the trip and then we'll open it up for your questions.

All right, so Senior State Department Official Number One, over to you.

SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL ONE: Thanks, folks. The Secretary's trip to the region centers on two main themes. First, the United States is not leaving the Middle East. Despite reports to the contrary and false narratives surrounding the Syria decision, we are not going anywhere. The Secretary will reinforce that commitment to the region and our partners.

Second, the Iranian regime is the dangerous actor in the region. There is no greater threat to stability than the Iranian regime. The 12 demands that the United States has asked for remain. The Secretary will continue his work on galvanizing our regional partners and allies to counter the regime's destabilizing activities.

MODERATOR: And now we'll go to Senior State Department Official Number Two.

SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL TWO: Thank you. In Amman, the Secretary's trip will be an opportunity to reinforce our commitment to Jordan's stability and security which remains as strong as ever a commitment from us, and to continue to enhance our partnership with Jordan for the benefit of broader regional security and stability.

To that end, Jordan, of course, has been a key partner in the campaign to defeat ISIS and has long been a key stabilizing element in the broader region. And this is why the United States continues to be the single largest donor of economic security and humanitarian assistance to Jordan, providing \$1.3 billion in bilateral foreign assistance to Jordan and \$200 million in DOD support to Jordan's armed forces in Fiscal Year '17. And the United States' largest (inaudible) AID program is in Jordan as well, and our foreign military financing with Jordan is the third largest in the world.

The point to all these is that this isn't just altruistic support for Jordan. By providing this kind of support, we're actually helping to preserve the U.S. interests and allied interests in regional security and stability.

MODERATOR: Thank you, and now Senior State Department Official Number Three.

SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL THREE: Thank you. The U.S. relationship with Egypt is one of our longest-standing, deepest and broadest partnerships in the region for over four decades now, and Egypt continues to have a vital role in contributing to regional security and stability, including through counterterrorism efforts, supporting the UN-facilitated political process in Libya, Middle East peace, and of course countering the Iranian regime's dangerous activities.

There is also the – its importance for regional economic growth and prosperity, and under President al-Sisi's leadership, Egypt is undertaking many important initiatives, especially on the economic and energy fronts.

There are also broader socioeconomic – social issues such as President al-Sisi's efforts to advance religious tolerance and reform religious discourse in the region, and we look forward to seeing the fruits of this broadened and deepened bilateral cooperation, which of course also includes emphasizing the importance of the protection and advancement of human rights and the vital

role that civil society plays in giving a voice to citizens to help address their country's challenges and contribute to stability and prosperity. And the Secretary will be engaging on all of these issues while he is there.

MODERATOR: And finally, State Department – Senior State Department Official Number Four.

SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL FOUR: Good morning. The Secretary is going to underline the key theme of U.S. leadership in the region by visiting all six of the Gulf Cooperation Council countries.

This is highly unusual for a Secretary of State to visit all of the countries on one particular trip. He's visited several of them already as the Secretary of State, and of course, numerous of them previously as the CIA director. He'll be able to underscore the importance of maintaining key partnerships as we tackle common regional challenges like Syria, Yemen, and Afghanistan, and it will – his trip will also follow up on the President's summit in Riyadh in May 2017 and regular, consistent travel by Cabinet officials to the Gulf such as former Secretary of Defense Mattis, Secretary of Treasury Mnuchin, Secretary of Energy Perry, who all had strong engagements in the Gulf.

He will convene two strategic dialogues, the first in Doha and the second in Kuwait, so he will keep alive for – on an annual basis the strategic dialogues that we've engaged in with both of those countries.

Very briefly, in Bahrain, the Iran policy will be front and center. Bahrain is a front-line state, if you will, in our Iran strategy. Iran seeks to agitate the Shia population in Bahrain through weapons trafficking and various other means. The Secretary will be able to thank the Bahrainis for their continued provision of a key platform for us through the Fifth Fleet in Bahrain. He will also thank the Bahrainis for the excellent work that they have done on human trafficking, moving up to a Tier 1 status, which is terrific for a country of the Middle East.

In the UAE, he will reinforce counterterrorism partnerships with the Emiratis. He will look to underscore our partnership with the UAE in Yemen.

In Doha, as mentioned, he will convene a strategic dialogue. The last one was convened in January 2018 here in Washington; our turn to go there to meet with the Qataris, and we'll have a full range of discussions in that strategic dialogue on multiple areas of cooperation. He will also talk about aviation with the Qataris, which is another issue that is on our bilateral agenda.

Saudi Arabia's been an important pillar for regional stability on a multitude of issues. We'll certainly talk about the Yemen conflict and Saudi Arabia's support for the outcomes of the Sweden process that took place last month.

He will raise the case of journalist Jamal Khashoggi and continue to push for accountability and credibility from the Saudi leadership as they move through the legal process that began earlier this week.

He'll thank the Omanis in Muscat, the sultan in particular, for the strong efforts that the sultan has made on Middle East peace by hosting both Israeli and Palestinian leaders earlier this fall. Oman plays a critical role on Yemen, so that will feature in his discussions there. And the Omanis will just have hosted a meeting of the economic and energy pillar of the Middle East Strategic Alliance – that's January 9th. The Secretary will thank the Omanis for that. It's also the 10th year of the U.S.-Oman Free Trade Agreement, so that's been a milestone in our relationship with the Omanis.

Finally, in Kuwait, he'll be able to underscore our strong partnership with the Kuwaitis. Kuwaitis have been very helpful on regional challenges including Iraq reconstruction, support for refugees in Syria. He will have the aforementioned strategic dialogue, which would be the third annual strategic dialogue with the Kuwaitis, and he'll thank the emir for everything that the Kuwaitis have done to push Gulf unity under the leadership of the emir of Kuwait.

MODERATOR: Thank you, and now we'll go to the first question.

OPERATOR: We'll go to the line of Karen DeYoung with The Washington Post. Please, go ahead.

QUESTION: Hello. I have a question. I'm not sure who would answer it. But there's been a lot of discussion in the Arab world about the possibility of the United States organizing groups of troops from Arab countries to go to Syria, particularly in the northern part of Syria. Could you talk about whether that is something the Secretary will be addressing? And also, the previously planned GCC summit in this country, is that still on the calendar and is it going to happen?

SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL TWO: Yeah, on the question of Arab troops to Syria, of course we're exploring a variety of options – I won't go into details on those – but we don't have any plans right now to facilitate Arab forces going into Syria.

SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL FOUR: It's our hope that a GCC summit would take place in 2019, preferably even in the first quarter if it can be arranged. You remember that from the summit in Riyadh in 2017, it was agreed that there would be an annual summit. We haven't exactly kept to that calendar due to a lot of regional dynamics, but it is a commitment of the United States to host the GCC, and we envision that the steps that have been taken both through Secretary Pompeo hosting a GCC+2 meeting in New York in September, plus this MESA working group continues to build the kind of unity within the GCC countries that will make a summit very productive.

MODERATOR: Thank you. We'll go on to the next question.

OPERATOR: The line of Lesley Wroughton from Reuters. Please, go ahead.

QUESTION: Yes, good morning. I wonder if you can get a little bit more into what the Secretary is going to push. You spoke about more accountability on the Khashoggi murder, but exactly what is it that he's going to be seeking

from the Saudis during his discussions? And number two, on Syria, is the Secretary going to discuss any sort of timeline of a troop withdrawal – U.S. troop withdrawal in Syria?

SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL FOUR: The Secretary's been very consistent in engagements with the Saudis, including his trip to Riyadh in the middle of October two weeks after Khashoggi's death, to really press the points – the two points of accountability and credibility, which is that the Saudis should have a credible narrative for what happened in the consulate and subsequent events, and that there is full accountability, that the perpetrators and planners are identified by the Saudis and that appropriate punishments are meted out. As you know, we have placed visa restrictions on 21 individuals. A court proceeding began this week in Riyadh in which the 11 individuals who have been indicted were brought to the court. As you've seen, the Saudis and – the prosecutor tends to pursue the death penalty for five of them. We're not attempting to get into the weeds of how all this is done, but we do think there needs to be a credible legal process, that it should move along with alacrity, and that – as I say, that accountability is very important for the United States for the perpetrators and the planners.

SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL TWO: Concerning Syria, we have no timeline for our military forces to withdraw from Syria. The President has made the decision that we will withdraw our military forces from Syria, but that it will be done in a deliberate, heavily coordinated way with our allies and partners. It will be done in such a way that we maintain – we and our allies and partners maintain pressure on ISIS throughout, and that we do not open up any vacuums for terrorists to exploit.

MODERATOR: All right, thank you. On to the next question, please.

OPERATOR: It's the line of Nick Wadhams with Bloomberg News. Please, go ahead.

QUESTION: Hi, thanks very much. I just wanted to follow up on that last question. You said there's no timeline, so, I mean, that would suggest that troops will be in there indefinitely. And yes, the President has made a decision to withdraw, but all of the indications were, when that announcement came through, that troops would be withdrawn fairly imminently, if not in 30 days then maybe within four months. But now I just want to confirm. You're saying there is absolutely no timetable on when they would come home. Can you give a sense for – would it be a year, six months, something else?

And then also, [Senior State Department Official Four], on the Khashoggi situation, when you say you think there needs to be a credible legal process and a credible narrative, are you saying that you don't believe the narrative so far on what happened to Jamal Khashoggi has been credible? Thanks.

SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL TWO: Yeah, just to clarify, we do not intend to have an indefinite military presence in Syria. The President has made the decision that we will withdraw, and we are formulating the plans to do that right now, as I said, in a deliberate and heavily coordinated way, but we will be leaving. But as I said, we will be leaving in such a way that

we do not open up vacuums for terrorists to exploit and that we do not allow for the possibility of a resurgence of ISIS anywhere, and that we continue to maintain the pressure against ISIS remnants now that the ISIS territorial caliphate is essentially defeated.

SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL FOUR: Nick, I don't think from our point of view that the narrative emerging from the Saudis or the legal process is yet – has yet hit that threshold of credibility and accountability, so we have continued to work this issue with the Saudis, underscoring that it's in their interest to pursue this as aggressively as they can to get this albatross off their backs and to get out from under the shadow of this incident which has caused such an outcry.

So I think we're – we were pleased to see the legal process get underway. We're very keen to see that continue, as I say, it should be done in a way that adds to the credibility and accountability issues. We would like to see this process move as quickly as possible so that the Saudis can hit that threshold sooner rather than later.

MODERATOR: Thank you, on to the next question, please.

OPERATOR: To the line of Francesco Fontemaggi with AFP. Please, go ahead.

QUESTION: Hi, thanks for doing this call. The White House announced, I think, late December that the Secretary will also go to Baghdad on January 11. Is that Iraqi part of the trip still planned? And another question is that this trip is quite broad, visiting – actually it's like eight countries – I was wondering if there is a reason why he's not going to Israel and the Palestinian territories. Thank you.

SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL ONE: So I'll just say on the Iraq side, this is – the schedule we've laid out is the trip as it stands. This is the countries he is planning to visit. If that changes, we'll update you as it happens.

MODERATOR: On to the next question, please.

OPERATOR: That's Michele Kelemen with NPR. Please, go ahead.

QUESTION: Hi, thanks. There are a couple of questions. One is: How is he going to handle the Qatar-Saudi split on this? Is he – the split in general, what's his message on that? And also, does the U.S. have any position on Syria returning to the Arab League? Is that going to be a topic of conversation?

SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL FOUR: Michele, he will underscore the importance of GCC unity, so in that sense, the rift is unhelpful to what – to our broader goals, and we've argued that even to the region, the Gulf region's own goals. As we said at the beginning of the call, Iran is viewed – we view as the key threat, the key destabilizing actor in the region. We've long said that the Gulf dispute benefits Iran. We'd like to see Iran not derive benefit from divisions and cleavages within our Gulf partners. So to the extent that we are able to close those divisions, build confidence

among the blockading countries and Qatar, the Secretary intends to do so.

SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL TWO: Concerning the question of Syria and the Arab League, I think writ large, it continues to be our position that political isolation and political pressure is the appropriate approach to take to try to press the Syrian regime to make the kind of meaningful changes necessary both to settle the Syrian conflict in a peaceful way and also to try to achieve the other U.S. objectives in Syria, including the exit of all Iranian-commanded forces and for Syria not to be a safe haven for terrorism and for ISIS and other terrorists to be defeated as a threat there.

So I think we would respectfully disagree with some of the Arab countries that are adopting a different approach or advocating a different approach of re-establishing political relations with the Syrian regime at this time.

MODERATOR: Thank you, and we'll take the next question now.

OPERATOR: To the line of Tracy Wilkinson with the Los Angeles Times. Please, go ahead.

QUESTION: Hi, thank you. [Senior State Department Official One], you described as a false narrative this idea that the United States was sort of disengaging a little bit from the Middle East. Given both that Trump has announced the withdrawal from Syria, which gives space to Iran, and followed it up by saying Iran could do whatever it wants to in Syria as far as he was concerned, how do you convince the allies that the United States is truly still as forcefully committed to challenging Iran and to being engaged in the Middle East beyond rhetoric and sanctions and a few measures like that? Thanks.

SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL ONE: Hey, I think our policy of maximum pressure on Iran hasn't changed. We are achieving a tremendous amount of economic pushback on Iran in response to its destabilizing regional activities, far more than perhaps people expected us to. And this, I think, is having an effect on the Iranians. So these are not just rhetoric and sanctions. This is a tremendous whole-of-government approach that is really putting effective pressure on Iran for the first time in a long time.

SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL TWO: Yeah, and I'd add to that by saying our military posture in Syria may be changing, but our overall goals in Syria remain the same, and key among those is, as Secretary Pompeo has said many times, to see the withdrawal from Syria of all Iranian-commanded forces. And we continue to have other means, other tools beyond just our military posture in northeast Syria to bring to bear on that problem, and we'll continue to do so.

MODERATOR: And that was senior official number one and number two who were just speaking. We'll go to the next question.

OPERATOR: The line of Barbara Usher from the BBC. Please, go ahead.

QUESTION: Thank you. Most of my questions have been answered, but I wanted to just follow up with the speech that Mr. Pompeo is giving in Cairo. Is

there a reason why he's doing it in Egypt? I mean, is it supposed to sort of emulate or counter Obama's appeal to the Muslim world from Cairo? Is there any thinking about that?

And then just to follow up on Khashoggi, again, you said that – that you had not yet hit the mark in terms of credibility, so you were looking at the legal process. So what is your take on the government shuffle last week that didn't touch Mohammed bin Salman at all, whereas the criticism is that he's the main culprit in this? Thank you.

SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL THREE: Well, as far as the choice of Egypt goes, I mean, I think Egypt, with its geostrategic location and demographic weight and importance in the region, is the perfect location to make a speech about our regional issues and considerations. And all I really can say is the Secretary's going to speak about America as a force for good in the region, and beyond that, I'm going to leave it to him to elaborate on that theme.

SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL FOUR: We don't see the government reshuffle in Saudi Arabia as related to Khashoggi. We think it's something that had been planned or was in the works for some time, and according to the Saudis, was very much in keeping with their reform process, so shifting a couple of individuals around key portfolios, et cetera. So we do not see it as related to a Khashoggi matter.

MODERATOR: So those were officials three and four. We'll go on to the next question.

OPERATOR: It's the line of Joel Gehrke with the Washington Examiner. Please, go ahead.

QUESTION: Hi, thank you for doing this call. I was wondering – I'm not sure who's best to answer this, but how do you see the goal for Turkey in terms of forfeiting or rolling back Iranian presence in Syria, particularly in light of their – Turkish rhetoric about U.S. sanctions on Iran and also some of the barbs that have been traded between Erdogan and Netanyahu?

SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL ONE: I think Turkey shares our concerns about the destabilizing Iranian influence across the region. This is something that's not new to them and it's something that we remain in close consultation with about.

Do you want to add anything about the upcoming engagement?

SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL TWO: I think – I mean, one of the – of course, we've been in close consultation with our Turkish allies throughout the course of the Syrian conflict, and most recently, of course, that's been something that Ambassador Jeffrey has been very heavily involved in.

And throughout, the Turkish side, as they've talked to us, have made it very clear that they see the expansion of Iranian malign influence in Syria as a highly destabilizing dynamic in the northern Middle East and one that touches on and is – poses risks for Turkish security. And they've expressed

repeatedly that they agree with us that Iranian-commanded forces should exit Syria, that they're – that it's in no one's interests for the IRGC to be able to continue to try to build out a power projection platform within Syria that they can use against Syria's neighbors. So I think we're pretty closely aligned in the strategic end with Turkey on that count.

MODERATOR: And those were officials number one and two. We have time for one last question, we'll go with that.

OPERATOR: And that's the line of Jennifer Hansler with CNN. Please, go ahead.

Hansler's line has accidentally disconnected, sir.

MODERATOR: Okay. Let's take the next one.

OPERATOR: And there are no other questions at this time, sir.

MODERATOR: All right. Well, then we'll conclude now. I thank everyone for joining us today. I thank our speakers for taking the time to speak with us. The call is now concluded, so the embargo is lifted. We thank you all. Enjoy the rest of your day.

The Office of Website Management, Bureau of Public Affairs, manages this site as a portal for information from the U.S. State Department. External links to other Internet sites should not be construed as an endorsement of the views or privacy policies contained therein.

[Press Releases: Interview With Sean Hannity on Hannity](#)

Interview
Michael R. Pompeo

Secretary of State

Washington, DC
January 3, 2019

QUESTION: Mr. Secretary, good to see you. I see this as a massive national security issue. It deals with relations, obviously, with Mexico. It's about drugs being brought into the country, human trafficking, criminals, gang members, some people that have ties to terror. Why shouldn't we all view this as a national security issue?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Well, Sean, thanks for having me on tonight. We should. We should all be very serious about this. I've been the CIA director. I'm now the Secretary of State. This has enormous national security implications. Border security is an important part of American sovereignty and keeping Americans safe. There is a central role to make sure that we know who is coming in and what is coming in to our country, and President Trump is doing the right thing in making sure we understand what's moving across that border, and we do so with enough border security so we have confidence and we can do this on behalf of the American people.

QUESTION: We've been able to apprehend 3,700 people that we have identified as having ties to terror?

SECRETARY POMPEO: There's lots of risks associated. The narcotics risk itself has enormous implications for people inside the United States. There are lots of things that come across that southern border that we need to get control over, and President Trump is determined to make that happen. It includes the risk that we have terrorists come across that border.

QUESTION: We're talking about Central America, but you've had a pretty busy year. We have the talks with North Korea, talk about denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula. We have issues now with China. We also have issues with the Middle East, new alliances, opportunities hopefully emerging, certainly with Israel, with the Iranian deal being drawn back. Where do you see on the world stage, where is America different now? Because I don't think the President gets a lot of credit for a lot of progress around the world.

SECRETARY POMPEO: Oh, Sean, we have made fundamental changes in American foreign policy that enormously benefit the American people. I could tick through the same list of places that you spoke about. The previous administration had decided that the world's largest state sponsor of terror was the partner in the Middle East, Iran. We have fundamentally flipped that. We know that that is a real threat to the world and to America, and so we have developed relationships with Arab countries and Israel. We've brought them together to develop a coalition to keep Americans safe from things going on in the Middle East.

You spoke first, I think, about North Korea. Lots of work that is left to be done, but I am confident that in the next short period of time President Trump and Chairman Kim will get the chance to meet again and truly create a much better, safer America with less threat of not only nuclear weapons being launched at us but nuclear proliferation as well. These are real risks and real changes from the previous administration's policies.

QUESTION: All right, let's talk specifically about North Korea. So the President has been hinting and saying that there's going to be another

meeting with Kim Jong-un. Will that be about and will there be the potential at that meeting of the denuclearization of the entire peninsula? Obviously, missiles aren't being fired, remains have been sent back, hostages have been released, so a lot of progress. Is this where you might close that deal?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Sean, I'd be surprised if we get all the way home in this meeting, although it would be fantastic if we did. I don't want to tell you exactly what our negotiating strategy is, but suffice it to say I think we have set the conditions where we can make real progress when Chairman Kim and President Trump meet and take down the threat to the United States and to the world that has been, frankly, holding America hostage for so long in North Korea. It'll be good for South Korea. It'll be good for Japan. It'll be good for all of the world.

QUESTION: But putting aside the Khashoggi incident, there seemed to be an emerging new alliance against Iranian hegemony, and that would be the United States, our closest ally is Israel, the Saudis, Egyptians, Jordanians, up till recently the Emirates, against the Iranians. Do you see an opportunity, a historic opportunity, where these alliances could lead to a peace that nobody could even have been thinking about 10 years ago?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Sean, undoubtedly, we have set the conditions in the Middle East where these countries are now working together across multiple fronts. You saw the President's announcement about our withdrawal from Syria. We're still going to be able to effectively with those partners counter the threat from ISIS in the region, and we'll do it without those 2,000 soldiers on the ground. We haven't changed our policy about continuing to make sure that there is no ISIS resurgence, and we're just going to do it in a way that is smarter and better. And we can do that because of the alliances that President Trump has built.

QUESTION: All right, let's talk about China in the sense they've had a massive military buildup, but your State Department issued a warning to Americans traveling to China that, in fact, they could issue exit bans preventing Americans from leaving. What's the status?

SECRETARY POMPEO: But, Sean, we didn't change the level of the warning there in China. We did change some of the language. We do our best here to constantly review things that might happen to Americans who are traveling abroad. We saw what happened with the American there in Russia. Our job is to always have Americans safe who are traveling, and we wanted to let them know that there have been more risks from what China has done in terms of folks traveling there and not being permitted to return. We just wanted to make them aware of that, and I am hopeful that we got the language just right so Americans will understand the risk but still travel there when it's appropriate.

QUESTION: Let's talk about the latest in terms of the relationships with Russia – obviously a hostile regime, obviously a hostile actor in Vladimir Putin. Not only the United States but other countries have experienced their cyber warfare, if you will, or their desire to create chaos in other countries. But if you can address that and also their support of the

Iranians, their influence in Syria, and do you see an Iranian-Russia-Syrian alliance that would worry you?

SECRETARY POMPEO: I am concerned about that, and frankly, the Russians' behavior has not been good. But this administration has been very serious at responding to that, whether it was the strike that President – the strikes the President has taken in Syria – those were in Syria but the Russians were all around it, our effort with respect to what the Russians did in Skripal, the sanctions we've put on Russian oligarchs who have threatened America and American interests. Those are real responses.

We've done that, Sean, at the same time that we're trying to find space where we can work with them, trying to find opportunities where the Russians' and American interests overlap even if our value sets do not so that we can work together against some of these most difficult problems. It's been tough, and Vladimir Putin has not cooperated, but we're still trying to find a place to do that.

QUESTION: The President has some critics as it relates to saying that he wants to withdraw from Syria and Afghanistan. Is there a timetable, or will it be based on the situation on the ground?

SECRETARY POMPEO: The President has always been very clear that he wanted to get our soldiers back home. In Syria he's made that decision, and we are working in that direction. That decision's done, and we will withdraw from Syria.

The timeline, it will be consistent with what we can do to make sure that our soldiers are safe, that we continue the counter-ISIS campaign, that we do all that we can to keep the coalition against Iran together. Those are also things that the President has made very clear he was going to do when he visited Iraq now – goodness – a week ago. He made very clear that those were things that were also important. So we will manage those threats to America, but we will do so without a couple thousand folks on the ground in Syria.

QUESTION: I wouldn't even venture a guess how many frequent flyer miles you have as a result of just the one year. We've been friends a long time. I know how hard you're working and how much success is happening on the world stage. Secretary Pompeo, thanks for joining us.

SECRETARY POMPEO: Sean, thank you very much. Have a good evening.

The Office of Website Management, Bureau of Public Affairs, manages this site as a portal for information from the U.S. State Department. External links to other Internet sites should not be construed as an endorsement of the views or privacy policies contained therein.