

Press Releases: Special Representative Ambassador James Jeffrey Travels to Turkey and Switzerland

Media Note
Office of the Spokesperson

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Special Representative for Syria Engagement and Special Envoy for the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS Ambassador James Jeffrey and Deputy Assistant Secretary and Special Envoy for Syria Joel Rayburn will travel to Ankara, Turkey for meetings on April 30-May 2, 2019. Ambassador Jeffrey will lead an interagency delegation to continue discussions with senior Turkish officials on Syria, to include addressing Turkey's legitimate security concerns, promoting stability and security in northern Syria as the U.S. military draws down its presence, and advancing issues of mutual interest, including the implementation of UNSCR 2254 on resolution of the Syrian conflict as well as the enduring defeat of ISIS.

Following Turkey, Ambassador Jeffrey and DAS Rayburn will travel to Geneva, Switzerland from May 2-3 for a series of meetings with members of the Syria Small Group, including Special Envoys from Egypt, France, Germany, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and the United Kingdom. The delegations will discuss the latest developments in the ongoing Syrian conflict, with particular emphasis on rising violence in northwest Syria, the need for unhindered humanitarian assistance throughout the country, and further support for UN efforts to foster a Geneva-based political process in accordance with UNSCR 2254.

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Press Releases: Conversation With The Hill's Editor-in-Chief Bob Cusack The Hill's Newsmaker Series

Remarks

Michael R. Pompeo

Secretary of State

Council on Foreign Relations

Washington, DC

April 29, 2019

MR CLEMONS: Good morning, everyone. My name is Steve Clemons. I'm the new editor-at-large of The Hill. It's a real pleasure to be with all of you this morning. Thank you for joining us for The Hill's newsmaker series. We will be joined in a moment by Secretary of State Michael Pompeo, who just on Friday celebrated his first anniversary in his job, so this is a key moment, the first business day of his next year, so we'll see how he does. In just a few minutes, we will have a very timely conversation on a wide range of foreign policy topics.

First, I'd like to thank our sponsor, Partnership for Open and Fair Skies, for underwriting today's conversation.

As the public face of public diplomacy, Secretary of State Michael Pompeo is tasked with advancing our nation's geopolitical and economic interests across the world. We look forward to hearing from the Secretary and the administration's foreign policy agenda and his view of America's position on the global stage.

Before we begin, a few quick housekeeping notes. In addition to all of you being here this morning, we are live now on C-SPAN 2, so hello to our C-SPAN viewers. We're also streaming on thehill.com. Please keep your phones on silent through the duration of the program, but don't keep them inactive. We encourage you to share our conversation, what you enjoy, what you want to challenge on social media. You can do this on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and LinkedIn. We are @TheHillEvents – @TheHillEvents – and join the conversation by using the hashtag @TheHillNewsmakerPompeo. All I can say is I'm glad we have 280 characters with that.

Finally, you will receive an electronic survey following the conclusion of

today's event. We will always be eager to hear how you can make our events more dynamic, improve the croissants, et cetera, and I encourage you to take a few moments to provide your feedback on today's program.

I would like to now invite my friend, Scott Reed, managing partner for the Partnership for Open and Fair Skies, to the podium to offer brief remarks. Scott, the floor is yours. (Applause.)

MR REED: Good morning, everybody. Thank you, Steve, for that nice introduction. I'd like to thank The Hill and Bob Cusack for organizing today's event, and congratulate The Hill on bringing on Steve Clemons as editor-at-large. I also want to thank the men and women that are here, our pilots and our flight attendants, for joining us this morning.

We appreciate Secretary Pompeo for taking the time in his busy schedule to join us for what I know will be an informative and fascinating conversation. And I'd also like to congratulate Secretary Pompeo on his recent one-year anniversary when he was sworn in at the State Department. Over the last year, he's been a strong advocate for America's interests abroad and an important advisor to President Trump.

As Bob said, I'm the managing partner for the Partnership for Open and Fair Skies, a coalition that represents the three major U.S. airlines Delta, American, and United, as well as seven labor unions representing airline employees. You might wonder: What could possibly bring these three airlines together considering that they're such fierce competitors? And while, yes, these airlines compete for our business every day of the year, they're also united in their common belief that every airline should operate and compete on a level playing field.

For two-and-a-half decades, that playing field has been governed by bilateral aviation trade agreements known as Open Skies. These agreements allow carriers to fly between two countries with no restrictions, and when enforced properly, no government interference. But over the last decade, the governments of Qatar and the United Arab Emirates have funneled more than \$50 billion into three state-owned carriers: Emirates, Etihad Airways, and Qatar Airways. Those subsidies violated the sanctity of Qatar and UAE's respective Open Skies agreements with the United States.

Unfortunately, the Obama administration did nothing to address this issue in a meaningful way, but the election of President Trump brought renewed hope that his administration would hold these trade cheaters accountable and stand up for American workers. President Trump and Secretary Pompeo have done precisely that. Last year, the administration reached historic agreements with the governments of the UAE and Qatar that will increase transparency and accountability moving forward.

But we know this isn't the end of the dispute. The Government of Qatar is now massively subsidizing a tiny regional carrier called Air Italy, which it owns a sizable stake in. The stakes of this fight are real. Continued Open Skies violations puts 1.2 million American jobs at risk. It affects everyone from pilots to flight attendants to the ground crew to the employees at the

airport. And as Secretary Pompeo has said, we cannot allow our so-called allies to take advantage of American businesses and American workers. We're proud to call Secretary Pompeo our friend in this fight, and we look forward to the State Department and the entire administration continuing to stand up for U.S. airline workers and the airline industry and enforcing our agreements.

I'm sure this topic will come up more, but with that, I'd like to turn it back over to our host Steve. Thank you. (Applause.)

MR CLEMONS: Thank you so much, Scott. I love all the airlines equally. (Laughter.) And now I'd like to introduce – without further ado, it's my great pleasure to welcome Jimmy Finkelstein – excuse me, Jimmy – chairman and owner of *The Hill*. Jimmy, please. (Applause.)

MR FINKELSTEIN: So it is my honor now to introduce the Secretary of State, Secretary Pompeo. Most of you know that the Secretary was number one at West Point. He was – served with distinction in the Army. He graduated from Harvard Law School and served on the *Harvard Law Review*. He worked for Williams and Connolly, one of the great law firms in America, and most of you in the press here probably are represented by Bob Barnett, who's also Hillary's sparring partner. He was a successful businessman. He ran for – he was a congressperson for three terms, head of the CIA, and now the State Department. Any one of us would be proud to have one of those jobs; he had them all. So he's quite amazing.

Perhaps no one in history has been more prepared for the dangers and opportunities that our country faces. Again, we're honored to have Senator Pompeo today, and I'm going to hand him over to Bob Cusack, our esteemed editor. Bob and Mr. Secretary, welcome. (Applause.)

MR CUSACK: Thank you, Jimmy, and thank you, Mr. Secretary, for joining us this morning. As Steve mentioned before, Friday was your one-year anniversary at the State Department. You had a ceremony at Foggy Bottom. What has changed? What have you brought to the State Department?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Well, first of all, thank you. Thanks for having me here this morning. Thanks for the very kind introduction. I heard you were going to wing it and that always creates fear in my heart. (Laughter.) When I came to the State Department, I'd had the experience – I'd already been in the administration as the director of the CIA, so I was current both on the issues set as well as the operations of how the National Security Council was operating. So I had some advantages over coming into a cold start. But what I wanted to do was make sure to put diplomacy at the very front of what President Trump was doing. I wanted to make sure that our team was ready to do that, capable of doing that, had the commander's intent, that they understood what President Trump wanted. So I spent an awful lot of time in this first year making sure that that was the case. We talked about swagger, about being prepared to have the confidence as an American diplomat to know that you represent the greatest nation in the history of civilization and that you have both the benefit of that and the responsibility that comes alongside that. And so we spent a lot of time thinking about that. We have

great people there. I wanted to make sure to enable them.

I also told them that no secretary could deliver that unless he had the capability to show up with value. When you show up to brief the President or to work as part of the national security team, you don't get the benefit of the doubt because of who you are; you get the benefit of the doubt because you're showing up with information that is valuable, option sets that are relevant, and you are capable of demonstrating the value of what it is you're proffering when you have that conversation. So I was proud of what the team did during the first year.

MR CUSACK: Your predecessor did not have the best relationship with the President. How often do you talk to the President?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Goodness, a lot. (Laughter.)

MR CUSACK: Almost every day?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Oh sure, certainly, certainly.

MR CUSACK: Okay.

SECRETARY POMPEO: Certainly almost every day.

MR CUSACK: And are you – do you feel that now that it's more in sync? Because that was a controversial time during Rex Tillerson's tenure.

SECRETARY POMPEO: I'll leave the analysis of that to others. What's valuable is, look, a secretary of state has to know that he understands what the president wants. Every – I talked to every living former secretary of state before I was confirmed, and to a person they said the only asset that you have as you travel the world is the knowledge of your counterparts that you are speaking on behalf of the president and you are in sync with the president. To the extent you get out of sync with that leader, then you're just out shooting the breeze rather than actually delivering what America's foreign policy and diplomatic objectives are.

So I work hard. I work hard to try and deliver President Trump option sets, good policy frameworks by which to analyze these very difficult situations, and then once he's provided his intent, what it is he wants us to do make sure that I am delivering that in a way our allies and partners can understand it and help us achieve those objectives.

MR CUSACK: You said in recent interviews that you're not going to be running for Senate in 2020. But the question is: Has Mitch McConnell stopped calling you to run for the Senate? (Laughter.)

SECRETARY POMPEO: On behalf of my ethics advisor – (laughter) – look, I'm going to stay here as long as President Trump will allow me to continue to do this job. It's been an enormous privilege to serve as America's chief diplomat and to try and deliver on behalf of the 90,000 State Department employees, all the great work that they do.

MR CUSACK: It was reported that North Korea billed the United States \$2 million for a hospitalization of Otto Warmbier. Is that true, and was it paid?

SECRETARY POMPEO: I think President Trump made clear: At no time in this administration have we paid for any hostage to be released, and we have no intention of doing so. We've been very successful at this approach. The previous administration took a different approach, and we think this is the right policy. We think it's the right policy for the United States long term. We think it creates disincentives for terrorists and criminals and others to take innocent Americans and hold them, and it has proven also not to be a roadblock to us being successful.

I have a team, led by Robert – Ambassador Robert O'Brien, we're working so diligently to work against every one of these problem sets. I get briefed at least once a week on the status of every American that is wrongfully detained, the progress that we've made, and what it is we're going to do forward to try and get them back. I had an incredible privilege; I got to meet with the families with many of them now two, three weeks back. I also had a chance to meet with those who'd been detained back in 1979 in our embassy in Tehran, many of them. It's truly remarkable to see the consistency over what is now 40-on years, about it but – we get American policy right, how we can reduce the risk for Americans traveling abroad to be wrongfully held.

MR CUSACK: North Korea, they said – North Korea has said they want you out of the talks. Is that – any chance that happens?

SECRETARY POMPEO: The President gets to decide that. (Laughter.) We don't get to decide who my counterpart is, and President Trump gets to decide who will represent America. I still have the conn.

MR CUSACK: Okay. That's a good way of putting it. (Laughter.) You've said recently there will likely be a third summit with North Korea. Will that happen by the summer?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Don't know. I don't know. We want to make sure that we create the conditions where if we deliver that, if the two leaders get together, that we can make substantial progress. I think it's – I think we made progress in Hanoi; I know the rest of the world thinks differently. I had a chance to see what happened both in the run-up to that, the conversations, the discussions that were had. I was present for nearly all the conversations that took place between the two leaders there in Hanoi in well, and we came to a deeper understanding of the range of freedom, both sides, things we can do, what paths we might use to unlock this going forward. It's a difficult challenge; there's a reason it hasn't been resolved. And we're confident that as we continue to apply the economic pressure to North Korea that we'll get another opportunity to unlock and get North Korea to denuclearize. You've seen my team travel to Moscow, to Beijing, to work with our allies in Japan and in South Korea, to build out a coalition to support the global coalition to put these sanctions on, to try and unlock this.

MR CUSACK: The Mueller report, one of its conclusions was that Russia tried to seriously influence the 2016 election. Should the Obama administration done more?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Yeah, sure. Of course. The Russians interfered; it happened in the run-up to the election in 2016. Of course, they should have done everything they could to prevent to it. I don't want to go back and revisit and critique. We have the mission now to make sure this doesn't happen in 2020. We have been working diligently – I worked as the CIA director on the efforts to prevent not only Russian interference – this often gets – because of the nature of this city, this gets reduced to this little tiny notion that it's just Russia, and it's just election interference that proves the challenge. The threats are much broader. It's not just to our elections, it's to our infrastructure, it's to our telecommunications networks, it's to our financial systems. We have a duty to protect it, but not just from the Russians either. The Chinese are active; the Iranians are active. We have non-state actors that are also active trying to undermine the very sense of Western democracy, not just here in the United States but all around the world. We worked hard to protect elections all across Europe as they have taken place in 2017 and '18. We'll keep doing that as we move forward.

So this problem, which often comes to a soundbite or chyron, or a headline in your newspaper, is a much deeper challenge and one that President Trump has directed us all to be incredibly focused on.

MR CUSACK: So is it fair to say that Russia is still a threat to American elections?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Sure, of course. But it goes without saying they were a threat to our elections in 1974 too, right. And they interfered in our elections in the '80s. This is – there's – the fact that this town seems shocked by the fact that the Russians don't care for us – in that case, the Soviet Union – I find stunning.

MR CUSACK: (Off-mike.)

SECRETARY POMPEO: I find stunning because there's – I mean, this is reported, it's in books. You can see the Russian efforts over an extended period of time, and we should expect in 2050 the Russians will be at it still.

MR CUSACK: Have you communicated or will you communicate to all the presidential campaigns of what they should do if they're contacted by a foreign entity?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Not my job. Right?

MR CUSACK: Who's job is that?

SECRETARY POMPEO: FBI would have responsibility for that.

MR CUSACK: Okay.

SECRETARY POMPEO: The FBI will take the charge to make sure that we perform

our counterintelligence function appropriately and properly.

MR CUSACK: Do you think – Rudy Giuliani said recently there’s nothing wrong with taking foreign information in a presidential campaign. Do you agree with that?

SECRETARY POMPEO: I don’t have anything to say about that. I’ll let the White House and Mr. Giuliani speak for himself. We should – having said that, we should all be cognizant of the sources of the information we receive. We should be cognizant when we receive dossiers to make sure that they are – they’re right, that we have validated information before we report on it. We should always – every one of us has a responsibility to make sure that the information that we provide, the information we receive is truthful, accurate, and creates real value for whatever, wherever place we find ourselves, whether it’s at the State Department or the work I did as the director of the Central Intelligence Agency. We each have a duty to do that.

MR CUSACK: Do you think the media and election entities should not use stolen or hacked material?

SECRETARY POMPEO: I’ll leave that to others.

MR CUSACK: Others, okay.

SECRETARY POMPEO: Yeah. I’ve got lots of challenges.

MR CUSACK: Open Skies Agreement, this is an agreement that – the big lobbying battle in town on this. And the Trump administration is credited for striking an agreement last year, but there are U.S.-based airlines saying it’s not working and there could be – they’ve cited the economy – and possibly jobs lost. It needs to be revisited. Some in Congress have pressed you on this. Is the Trump administration going to revisit this agreement in any way?

SECRETARY POMPEO: We are constantly – I know the issue well. I’ve worked on it personally. I’ve spoken to nearly all of the U.S. carriers. I’ve spoke – I had my Qatari counterpart in town last week, if I remember the timing right, and we spoke that issue with him. The commitments that were made there were a result of a deep, complex process. Everyone worked in good faith as best I can tell. Some of it was before my time, but as best I can tell, everyone worked in good faith. We need to make sure that these commitments continue to be honored, and the Trump administration will endeavor to make sure that every commitment made by every party in that agreement will continue to be honored and enforced.

MR CUSACK: The audience submitted some questions. One of the questions was on this issue: What will you say to the airline workers here to let them know you support U.S. jobs in the industry?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Yeah, I think when you see the work that the State Department did to get the commitments that we did from all of the relevant parties, you can see the – President Trump’s State Department is absolutely focused on making sure we protect American jobs wherever we possibly can, and we will continue to do so.

MR CUSACK: Venezuela. You said on Fox & Friends earlier this month that Russia must stop influencing the situation there, they must leave. It's later in the month. Have you seen any progress in that area?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Nothing I can share with you this morning. I can say this: You've seen the efforts we've made to try and convince the Cubans – who have hundreds of intelligence officers, thousands of people working with the Maduro regime – to convince them that that's not the right foreign policy, that Maduro is going to leave. And when it leaves, they will be in a far better place if they chose a different path. We are making the same case to all the parties that are supporting Maduro, certainly the people inside his own military, his own army, the Cubans the next ring out, the Russians, but I – if you've been watching the news, the Iranians are providing support in Venezuela today as well. The Chinese, too, could do more. They could recognize the National Assembly and its – the chosen leader of Venezuela Juan Guaido.

There are many efforts at the State Department to restore democracy for the Venezuelan people. I – it is an imperative. It's in our space; it's here in the Western hemisphere. The opportunities in South America are enormous. We've seen this shift to freer economies, more democratically-elected leaders, and if we can get Venezuela to go right – this is a once-wealthy nation, it can be so again, and we can make sure that South America, Central America has a next 20 or 30 years that is democratic-led with free markets so there will be enormous economic growth that will benefit not only those country and the people in those countries, but the United States as well.

MR CUSACK: Do you believe he will be ousted this year? Are you seeing progress in that area?

SECRETARY POMPEO: I don't do timelines.

MR CUSACK: Okay. Journalists love timelines.

SECRETARY POMPEO: Yeah. I don't do timelines, because you won't give me any credit when we beat it.

MR CUSACK: That's fair, that's fair, but what about on the ground? Has there been progress made at least in that direction? That's what you're pushing for.

SECRETARY POMPEO: Yeah, I – yes, I absolutely think there is. I think we see leaders inside of Maduro's inner circle now trying to figure out what the golden ticket looks like. What does it look like if I leave? When they start asking those questions, surely, someone of them will decide that there are better times ahead not supporting that thug.

MR CUSACK: Are you satisfied with Saudi Arabia's handling of the death of Jamal Khashoggi? You said in February that you were still investigating the death. Is that probe still ongoing?

SECRETARY POMPEO: It is.

MR CUSACK: Do you think the body will ever be recovered?

SECRETARY POMPEO: I don't know the answer to that.

MR CUSACK: Did the Saudi government order his death?

SECRETARY POMPEO: I said all along, we're continuing to find every single fact we can about this. We are determined to hold every single person who we find who was materially responsible for that, to hold them accountable. The State Department has done that, the Treasury Department has done that, and we'll continue to work it. As new facts develop, American facts, things that we know for sure, we'll continue to hold everyone responsible for that murder of Jamal Khashoggi accountable. Period, full stop. The President's been very clear about that as well.

MR CUSACK: Trump administration recently announced sanctions on Iran – no more waivers, okay, and Turkey and China have said they're going to be undeterred. So what now and what will the effect be on gas prices, which have been going up recently?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Well, they actually fell 3 percent on Friday. I haven't seen what they did when the market opened this morning. They are – Brent crude is below or was on Friday when I last checked – was below the price that it was at the day that this administration chose to pull out of the JCPOA. So down, not up. So I hope – I hope reporters will get the headlines right. That's important. So we'll continue to work that. We've worked with alternative suppliers including alternative suppliers for the countries that we didn't grant waivers to. We've worked on alternative suppliers here in the United States of America. We produce as much crude oil as anybody out there. And so we're convinced we can make sure that the markets are adequately supplied. So we're continuing to work that.

But with respect to the absence of the granting of waivers and what others may do, sovereign nations make their own choices; individual businesses inside of that will make their own choices. What we can do is prepare a sanctions regime that makes it incredibly costly, and so companies that choose to violate the sanctions that we have in place connected to the purchase of crude oil from the Islamic Republic of Iran, we will pursue, and we will ensure that they are held accountable for the violations that they engage in. It's pretty straightforward.

MR CUSACK: Do you think this will have a negative impact on trade talks with China?

SECRETARY POMPEO: No, I don't believe so. I talked with Secretary Mnuchin end of last week. He's in China today – or not today, tomorrow – to continue the negotiations. We've had lots of talks with China about this issue. I am confident that the trade talks will continue and run their natural course.

MR CUSACK: The Trump administration has made significant progress in the fight against ISIS, especially when it comes to land. Is ISIS still a major threat?

SECRETARY POMPEO: The threat from radical Islamic terrorism remains. There is no doubt about that. We have made significant progress. I give our coalition partners – we built a coalition of over 80 countries, called the Defeat ISIS Coalition, an enormous global coalition to take down that caliphate. That coalition remains. The effort remains to continue to the defeat of ISIS everywhere we find it, whether it's in Afghanistan or in Southeast Asia. The threat from radical Islamic terrorism remains and we're going to stay at it. President Trump has made very clear it is a priority for him and we're devoting the appropriate resources to it.

MR CUSACK: You mentioned Iran a lot this morning. Does the administration support regime change?

SECRETARY POMPEO: We are hoping that the regime makes a set of decisions that are very different from the ones they're making today. It's interesting, Bob. I laid out almost a year ago, back in May of last year, 12 things –

MR CUSACK: Right.

SECRETARY POMPEO: – 12 things that we had as our expectation for what the Islamic Republic of Iran would do. And I've had others. Professionals in the establishment foreign policy community said, "Mike, those are outrageous." I'd simply ask you to go look at each one of them, each of the 12 things we asked for and tell me which one you actually think is outrageous. We're simply asking Iran to behave like a normal country, right. They're simple things like don't kill people in Europe, don't conduct assassinate – it's not outrageous. Is it outrageous to say that no, you shouldn't support Shia militias in Iraq to try and destabilize the Iraqi government so the Iraqi people can't have an independent, sovereign nation of their own? Is it outrageous to ask the Iranians not to continue to sow the strife in Lebanon by underwriting Hizballah?

If you stare at each of them, they're not much different than we ask of the Dutch, right. These are simply things about how nations ought to behave, and if Iran and its leadership can find its way there, we are happy to engage with them and bring them back into the community of nations.

MR CUSACK: Out of those 12 things, how many is Iran complying with?

SECRETARY POMPEO: You know, I'd have to go back and look at them. My guess would be zero.

MR CUSACK: Okay. Afghanistan, which has been called the longest war – what is the goal there? What is winning? Are we winning in Afghanistan?

SECRETARY POMPEO: President Trump's laid out a very clear goal with respect to our South-Central Asia strategy. We're working with partners and allies in the region, and we're working with people that we have not worked with in an awfully long time. My ambassador, Ambassador Khalilzad, is talking to the Taliban, and we are working to achieve a reconciliation so that this conflict now coming on two decades can be resolved. We can take down the violence level, we can get a political outcome.

From America's perspective, we have two goals. That's a necessary condition. The second necessary condition is that we continue to be able to perform our counterterror operations, the ones we were speaking about before. You mentioned ISIS in particular, but – they're in Afghanistan too, but we still have al-Qaida and other Sunni terror operations in Afghanistan as well to make sure that we can continue to prevent an attack on the homeland from Afghanistan.

So we have two objectives. We're working to achieve them, and I am hopeful that in the coming months, we'll have real progress.

MR CUSACK: Do you think –

SECRETARY POMPEO: It will ultimately – the last thing I'll say: It will ultimately depend on the Afghan people. Ultimately, he – Ambassador Khalilzad was in Kabul most of last week. Our ambassador, Ambassador Bass there in Kabul, is working on it too. We need a broad coalition of non-Taliban Afghans to come together. We need President Ghani to be successful so that we can ultimately get that political resolution. It will ultimately be up to the Afghan people to determine if this reconciliation can be successful.

MR CUSACK: You served in Congress. Do you think that Congress will pass the USMCA this year?

SECRETARY POMPEO: I'm out of that business. (Laughter.)

MR CUSACK: How – (inaudible.)

SECRETARY POMPEO: I will say this: It has a national security component to it that I care about deeply, and so I will be working members of Congress to convince them that this is the right path forward for Canada and for the United States and for Mexico to get this right and to support this agreement. It's the right thing to do for our national security relationships with those two countries as well, and so I – while I won't predict how members of Congress will vote, I will work to see that they support the administration's objective of getting this agreement across the finish line.

MR CUSACK: Cuba and the Major League Baseball Association had an agreement that the Trump administration basically scrapped, allowing Cuban players to join professional ranks. Why did you do that? And don't you think that some players are going to come anyway, which they did before this agreement was there, and possibly risk their lives?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Well, I won't predict what players will choose to do or not do. They'll each get to make that decision on their own. We made this decision because we had monies going to bad actors in Cuba, and that's not good for the Cuban people. It's that simple.

MR CUSACK: Congress recently passed a Yemen resolution that Trump – the President vetoed it. What – lay out kind of what the situation is there, and what is the future of U.S. military forces?

SECRETARY POMPEO: So, a complicated, longer answer, but I'll try and do it in

just a minute or a minute and a half. You should know that often not discussed is that the United States has an enormous effort to take down al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula, so we often hear these – about the conflicts, the civil war taking place in Yemen, but folks don't focus on the very real risk of external plotting that comes from Yemen from al-Qaida. So mission one is to protect America from the terror risk inside of Yemen.

With respect to the civil war, this is Iranian-led. We should just all be very clear about it. The Houthis, who continue to refuse to comply with the agreements that they signed up for in Stockholm, Sweden, they refused to move back from the port in Hodeida, they've refused to do all of the elements that the United Nations have laid out, because – very clearly, it's because the Islamic Republic of Iran has chosen to direct them to do that. You can see it with the missile systems, the hardware, the capabilities, now UAVs. These aren't Houthi indigenous weapon systems. These are systems that have been smuggled into Yemen from Iran.

And so the Saudis who have had missiles fly that could have hit you – see, there's folks here who are in the aviation community. Airplanes flying through King Khalid International Airport in Riyadh are at risk. And the United States has an obligation to protect our citizens, so the support that we're providing to the Saudis as they attempt to engage these dangerous missile systems is in America's best interest.

I know there are many senators, many on Capitol Hill who disagree with me, but the people who were the happiest when that resolution passed were Qasem Soleimani and the ayatollah. There's no doubt about that. When they see the United States shrink away from this challenge that puts United States citizens at risk, they think they have achieved a victory.

MR CUSACK: We have run out of time. Thank you, Mr. Secretary, and please thank the Secretary for joining us this morning. Thank you, Steve.

SECRETARY POMPEO: Thank you all very much.

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[Press Releases: Assistant Secretary of](#)

State Dr. Christopher A. Ford To Lead U.S. Delegation to the NPT Preparatory Committee Meeting 2019 in New York

Media Note
Office of the Spokesperson

Washington, DC
April 29, 2019

The third meeting of the Preparatory Committee for the Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons takes place at the United Nations in New York from April 29 to May 10, 2019. Assistant Secretary of State for International Security and Nonproliferation Dr. Christopher A. Ford will lead the U.S. delegation from April 29-30.

U.S. Permanent Representative to the Conference on Disarmament Ambassador Robert A. Wood will join Assistant Secretary Ford and lead the delegation for the remainder of the meeting.

In this year's meeting, the United States' overall approach is to emphasize the common interest all NPT Parties have to maintain and strengthen the Treaty in all its aspects. The central provisions of the NPT – relating to nonproliferation, disarmament, and peaceful uses of nuclear energy – reflect shared interests of all NPT Parties. The United States will highlight the Creating an Environment for Nuclear Disarmament initiative as a key part of its efforts to reinforce all of these aspects.

The Preparatory Committee meeting is an opportunity for all NPT Parties to recommit themselves to preserving and expanding the benefits of the NPT.

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[Press Releases: Republic of the Marshall Islands National Day](#)

Press Statement
Michael R. Pompeo

Secretary of State

Washington, DC
April 29, 2019

On behalf of the Government of the United States of America, I send my highest regards to the people of the Republic of the Marshall Islands on your 40th Constitution Day, May 1.

Our two countries share a deep friendship between our governments and our peoples. We are eternally grateful for the dedicated service of Marshallese citizens in the U.S. Armed Forces.

The Marshall Islands is a key partner in creating a vision for the Indo-Pacific that is prosperous, safe, and secure. I look forward to continuing our work together in maritime security, economic development, and strengthening outcomes on health, education, infrastructure, and resilience to natural disasters.

Please accept my sincere congratulations on this special occasion.

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[Press Releases: Sierra Leone National](#)

Day

Press Statement
Michael R. Pompeo

Secretary of State

Washington, DC
April 27, 2019

On behalf of the United States, I congratulate the Government and people of Sierra Leone as you celebrate your 58th independence day on April 27.

The United States remains committed to a strong partnership with Sierra Leone and to supporting Sierra Leone's efforts to strengthen its democracy, prosperity, and security. Sierra Leone has shown tremendous progress in maintaining peace, consolidating democracy, and promoting an environment for economic growth. The United States looks forward to future opportunities to expand our partnership to support prosperity for all of Sierra Leone's citizens.

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