

Press Releases: Remarks With Lebanese Foreign Minister Gebran Bassil

Remarks

Michael R. Pompeo

Secretary of State

Lebanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Beirut, Lebanon

March 22, 2019

FOREIGN MINISTER BASSIL: Welcome, Mr. Secretary. Welcome in Lebanon, friend of Lebanon.

(Via interpreter) I was honored to welcome the U.S. Secretary of State Mr. Mike Pompeo in a visit which is first of its kind to Lebanon. It showcases the importance and the depth of the relationships between the two countries, and it indicates the importance of the Lebanese stability. This is in terms of the form.

In terms of the content, it shows the depths of these particular relationships between the two countries. As such, we have established today a

positive and constructive dialogue based on the depth of the relationships between the two Lebanese and American people. Usually, when you establish ties between countries, it is more difficult to concretize this at the level of both peoples, but the bilateral relations between the two peoples are very deep. We have more than 1 million Lebanese who are well-integrated in the American community, and they were exceptionally hosted by the American community. And Mr. Pompeo experienced this when he was a congressman from the Kansas state.

The U.S. supports the legitimate institutions in Lebanon, most importantly, the Lebanese Army, which is the basic pillar and major pillar, and the guarantee of the stability in Lebanon. That is why we appreciate this. We thank this and we thank the Americans for their assistance to the security institutions, to the Lebanese Armed Forces. We thank the USA for the assistance granted to a large group of Lebanese communities.

We have discussed the border issues, and Lebanon is showing a lot of positivity in this regard. And as basic for that, the Lebanese sovereignty, and as you know, my position, personal position, is very clear, and the position of whom I represent is a positive position, and there is an opportunity to recover the rights of Lebanon, the lands of Lebanon, without any concessions. And this allows Lebanon to achieve a diplomatic and political victory. The political and diplomatic victory is equivalent to any kind of other victory. On such a basis we can achieve this without making any concessions, whether on the land or in the sea regarding the oil and gas resources, and we will exert a lot of efforts with internal parties in order to secure the rights of Lebanon.

As for the oil issues, it is a personal issues that I work on as a former minister of energy for a certain period and at a certain time, and we were able to convince the U.S. companies to take part in the bidding processes. And when they were eligible to do that, they did not want to participate anymore, then a consortium of European and Russian companies have won the bidding. They were coming, of course, from different countries, and as you know, there are sanctions imposed between the EU and Russia.

As such, I invited the American companies to take part in the bidding processes related to this field in Lebanon, and we invite as well the American companies to take part in the light of the alliance between Russia and the USA. But of course, as this would increase the stability and this would secure more stability in Lebanon. Lebanon, with multi-diversity, is open to – with its diversity to all. I have related our commitment to 1701 resolution and to secure tranquility at the southern borders and to stop the recurrent Israeli violations which are around 1,800 per year. And I reiterated the natural right of Lebanon to defend itself and to resist the occupation of its land and any aggression against its people, and it is a sacred right in the international treaties and instruments.

We discussed as well the diversity of Lebanon. And this Easter – and the USA invites us on a yearly basis to an interfaith dialogue conference. That is why I reiterated our desire to cooperate with the USA in order to hold this conference and to reject the unilaterals and to secure the diversity of

Lebanon, which is an unprecedented model, in order to counter terrorism. We cannot counter terrorism with unilateralism but with diversity, and the crimes perpetrated in New Zealand show the legitimacy of our position. The extremism leads to extremism, while tolerance coupled with international laws and instruments is remedy for extremism. It is the one that paves the way for dialogue, for peaceful coexistence and sound coexistence between populations.

I also discussed the issue of the displaced, and I explained to His Excellency Mr. Pompeo the risk and the danger of the presence of the displaced to the presence, the unique presence of the Lebanese identity, and I established a comparison with regards to the presence of the Syrian displaced in Lebanon. For Kansas, that has 2,700,000 U.S. citizens, if I apply the number of the Syrian displaced and the Palestinian refugees in Lebanon, which are 200 per square kilometer, they – it is equivalent to around 2 million Canadians in Kansas. And this is not related to the bilateral ties between countries; this shows that one American state would have to host 1.5 the number of the inhabitants of Canada, and this is unbearable for any country, especially for Lebanon.

As such, we have requested your support for the safe and decent return of the Syrian displaced without having it as a voluntary return, because the requirements for the return and the completion of these requirements do not give the displaced any choice to stay. When such requirements are fulfilled and secured, the return should take place. All in all, we did not talk about a forced and collective return. We are hosting those displaced, but it is time for their return, and this is in the interest of Lebanon. This is in the interest of all brotherly countries.

In Syria, the solution that we are striving for is a political solution. It is a solution that leads to democratic and free elections that gives to the Syrians the right to choose their own representatives. As such, Lebanon disassociates itself from all these issues and is willing not to intervene in the affairs of others so as to disable others from interfering in its own affairs.

At the end, we discussed the Hizballah issue from our own side – from both sides as well. From our side, we reiterated that Hizballah is a political party, that it is not terrorist. His deputies are being elected by the Lebanese people, and they garnered a huge political support. As for the classification of Hizballah as a terrorist group, it is not our classification. It is a classification of the country that wants to do that, but we are attached to our national unity and we are attached to the fact that this should preclude good relations with the USA.

As such, we do not want our relations with the USA to be impacted or influenced by this, and we want to work together in order to solve all these problems, including the issue of Hizballah and the perception of Hizballah and how to deal with Hizballah.

At the end, the stability of Lebanon and the preservation of the national unity of Lebanon is in Lebanese interest and is in American interest. It is a regional interest and it is an international interest because there is an

interest in keeping Lebanon as a paradigm able to fight and counter terror and to show that it is a vital model.

Mr. Secretary, I would like to conclude with the following. I would like to address you and the American Government and the American people. Maybe geography separates us, but what unites us are human principles. What can separate us is the principle of resistance, but what unites us is the struggle for freedom. What separates us is unilateralism, but what unites us is the acceptance of the other. That is why Lebanon will be – remain unique in its diversity, in its rebellion, in its freedom, and it won't be at any time a fertile soil for terrorism, but a resistance to such terrorism. We won't change our nature, our diversity, and Lebanon won't be unilateral, but it will remain diversity. Please, show priority to the friendship with Lebanon and let us work for its stability and unity.

Thank you, Your Excellency.

SECRETARY POMPEO: Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Foreign Minister. Thanks for hosting me here today. It's great to be returning to Lebanon to – and for I think the third or fourth time, but the first time as Secretary of State. As the foreign minister said, I represented southcentral Kansas, home to a thriving population from – that came to the United States in the 1890s – successful entrepreneurs, doctors, leaders, capable immigrants that came to the United States and integrated successfully. It's that same flourishing that we see of the Lebanese people in southcentral Kansas that we hope for everyone here in this great country.

I had the chance to meet today with President Aoun, with Speaker Berri, with the prime minister, and now with the foreign minister. I have other meetings on my schedule for later today and tomorrow. In each of my discussions, Lebanese leaders conveyed their hopes for a better future of peace and security and prosperity for their country and for their people. Every citizen of Lebanon should know that the United States wishes precisely the same.

But we have to confront the facts. Hizballah stands in the way of the Lebanese people's dreams. For 34 years, Hizballah has put the Lebanese people at risk with unilateral, unaccountable decisions on war and peace, and life and death. Whether through political promises or outright intimidation of voters, Hizballah sits inside the national assembly or other state institutions and pretends to support the state. Meanwhile, Hizballah defies the state and the people of Lebanon through a terrorist wing committed to spreading destruction.

Hizballah's armed campaigns are squarely opposed to the interests of the Lebanese people. How does the expanding of – expending of resources and lives of those constituents in Yemen, Iraq, and Syria help the citizens of south Lebanon, Beirut, or the Bekaa Valley? How does stockpiling tens of thousands of rockets and missiles in Lebanon territory for use against Israel make this country stronger? Moreover, Hizballah does these nefarious activities at the behest of the Iranian regime. Its foot soldiers serve at Tehran's bidding. Hizballah and its illegitimate militia put the entire country of Lebanon on the front lines of Iran's misguided proxy campaigns.

Rest assured, Hizballah's Iranian patrons don't want the status quo in Lebanon to change. They see peace, prosperity, and independence for Lebanon as a fundamental threat to their political interest and their hegemonic ambitions.

Finally, Hizballah's global criminal networks – its drug smuggling, its attempts to launder money through the international system, and its interference with customs and other trade controls – place Lebanon under the microscope of international law enforcement. Indeed, Hizballah robs the Lebanese state of resources that rightfully belong to its people.

The Lebanese people should no longer be made to suffer for the political and military ambitions of an outlaw nation and its terrorist affiliate. It will take courage for the nation of Lebanon to stand up to Hizballah's criminality, terror, and threats. It will take effort to ensure full respect and independence for the Lebanese Armed Forces and other national security interests.

To be clear, we understand the issue of Syrian refugees in Lebanon. This is another dimension in Iranian aggression, and we support their return to Syria in a secure and voluntary manner as soon as conditions allow.

I want everyone in Lebanon to know that you will continue to have a friend in the United States. We will continue to support the legitimate state institutions of Lebanon and all of its people. In 2018, this year past, the United States provided more than \$800 million in assistance to Lebanon. A fair question: What did Hizballah and Iran contribute? They contributed coffins of young Lebanese returning from Syria and ever more Iranian weapons. Qasem Soleimani and Hizballah's other Iranian backers continues to undermine Lebanon's legitimate security institutions and jeopardize the safety and security of the Lebanese people. It's plain to see which country is a force for good in Lebanon.

The United States will continue to bring unprecedented pressure to bear on Iran until it ceases all malign behavior, including that which is carried out by Hizballah. Iran's support of Hizballah poses a threat to people – to Arab people of all faiths, it weakens the Lebanese state, and undermines the prosperity of future generations. It also increases the likelihood of conflict and undercuts opportunities for peace between Israel and the Palestinians. The clerics in Tehran provide Hizballah with as much as \$700 million each and every year. This is a staggering sum, especially given that up to 90 percent of Iran's labor force has long lived before – below the poverty line.

Our pressure on Iran is simple. It's aimed at cutting off the funding for terrorists, and it's working. On March 8th, Hassan Nasrallah begged Hizballah supporters to make new contributions. And we believe that our work is already constraining Hizballah's activities. The United States will continue to use all peaceful means – everything at our disposal – to choke off the financing, the smuggling, the criminal networks, and the misuse of government positions and influence that feeds Iran and Hizballah terror operations, and we will not hesitate to call out those who active –actively and passively support

these activities and betray the trust and hopes of the Lebanese people.

I've had a chance to discuss each of these issues with Lebanese leaders. I expressed hope that the new Lebanese Government would be able to meet the needs of the Lebanese people. In that regard, I shared concern about both external and internal pressures upon the government, including coming from some of its members which do not serve an independent, thriving Lebanon.

Frankly, Lebanon and the Lebanese people face a choice: Bravely move forward as an independent and proud nation or allow the dark ambitions of Iran and Hizballah to dictate your future. You all know the history. Lebanon has paid a terrible price over the past half-century for the sake of its independence. As I traveled from the airport, I was reminded powerfully of this past suffering. I passed the site where 35 years ago the predecessors of today's Hizballah murdered U.S. Marines on a peacekeeping mission. I passed near the site of the U.S. embassy where the same terrorist thugs killed America's diplomats as they worked. I viewed the memorial to Mr. Lebanon, Rafik Hariri, brutally assassinated for his courageous opposition to cruel tyranny of the Assad regime over Lebanon.

But from that bitter past a better future beckons, and it is all around us. Neither Iran nor its partner Hizballah have the right to exact more suffering from the Lebanese people. Beirut is rightly seen as a symbol of rebirth out of ashes; of coexistence out of separation; of mosques, churches, and synagogues rebuilt side by side in what was once a bitter green line that divided family from family and friend from friend.

Mr. Foreign Minister, you should know and I want all the Lebanese people to know the United States will continue to stand with the Lebanese people as they seize the opportunities they so richly deserve, to live as a free people.

Thank you.

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[Press Releases: Secretary Pompeo To](#)

[Deliver Remarks at the AIPAC Policy Conference](#)

Notice to the Press
Office of the Spokesperson

Washington, DC
March 22, 2019

Secretary of State Michael R. Pompeo will deliver remarks on fighting anti-Semitism at home and abroad at the AIPAC Policy Conference at the Walter E. Washington Convention Center in Washington, DC at 5:25 p.m. on Monday, March 25, 2019.

The event is open to credentialed members of the press who have arranged access through AIPAC. The Secretary's remarks will be live-streamed on <https://watch.aipac.org/>.

For more information, please contact Daniella Burgos of Scott Circle Communications at dburgos@scottcircle.com, AIPAC's Press Office via e-mail at press@aipac.org, or the Department of State's Office of Press Relations via e-mail at PAPressDuty@state.gov.

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[Press Releases: Secretary Pompeo's Meeting With Lebanese Forces Party](#)

Leader Samir Geagea

Readout
Office of the Spokesperson

Washington, DC
March 22, 2019

The below is attributable to Deputy Spokesperson Robert Palladino:

Secretary of State Michael R. Pompeo met in Beirut today with Lebanese Forces Party Leader Samir Geagea. They discussed a number of issues, including the Lebanese government's continued work to strengthen security and stability in the country and to address the needs of the Lebanese people. The Secretary also reiterated U.S. concerns regarding the destructive role Hizballah plays both domestically and abroad, and the risks the terror organization poses to the Lebanese people.

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Press Releases: Secretary Pompeo's Meeting With Leader of Lebanon's Druze Community Walid Jumblatt

Readout
Office of the Spokesperson

Washington, DC
March 22, 2019

The below is attributable to Deputy Spokesperson Robert Palladino:

Secretary of State Michael R. Pompeo met in Beirut today with Walid Jumblatt, leader of Lebanon's Druze community. They discussed a number of issues including the positive steps the recently formed government of Lebanon should take to address Lebanon's economic and security challenges. The Secretary and Jumblatt also discussed regional issues, including the Syrian refugee presence in Lebanon, and the need for their safe and voluntary return as soon as conditions permit.

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[Press Releases: Interview With Chris Mitchell and David Brody of Christian Broadcasting Network](#)

Interview
Michael R. Pompeo

Secretary of State

David Citadel Hotel
Jerusalem
March 21, 2019

QUESTION: Secretary Pompeo, thanks for doing this. Appreciate it.

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

QUESTION: The Western Wall – was there with you. What was that experience like and how impactful was something like that?

SECRETARY POMPEO: So I've been there before, but this was incredibly special. To be there with the Israeli prime minister and ambassador from the United States to Israel was really an important moment. It was special for me as a Christian. It was special I think to show the commitment the United States has to this democracy, this Jewish nation of Israel.

QUESTION: Speaking of that, you talked yesterday – you talked about being a man of faith. We know you're a man of faith. You talked about that yesterday, and I'm wondering about that apex between Israel and Christianity, and the Bible coming alive in this land. Can you talk about that a little bit and what that's all about, the relationship between the two?

SECRETARY POMPEO: So here we are in Jerusalem, the city that's so important to all three Abrahamic religions. Certainly today I was at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre as well. I got to see that; was the second time I had a chance to do that in my life. As a Christian, to go to that place that is so fundamental to the things you believe is just a very special thing. And at the same time, I'm the Secretary of State, tasked with defending the Constitution, supporting the President in his mission to keep our nation safe and to keep Israel safe. It's really quite something to be here and have this opportunity to travel to a place like the Western Wall, with all its history. We had a chance to go down and see some of the tunnels, the excavation that's been done there as well. That history reminds you of the history of the Jewish people here on this land; it reminds you of all of the rich religious traditions here in this place and how special Jerusalem really is. It makes you even more proud of the decision President Trump made to designate this and to show that this is truly the capital of Israel.

QUESTION: And that happened just over a year ago when –

SECRETARY POMPEO: It seems like a long time ago.

QUESTION: I know. And making history, and a lot of evangelicals and Israelis were ecstatic about moving the U.S. embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, but some are concerned about what might happen or what price they might pay in the peace plan that's upcoming right now. So they're concerned about that. What can you do to allay their fears of something like dividing Jerusalem in the upcoming peace plan?

SECRETARY POMPEO: So I've seen the details of the plan as it stands now. I'm sure there'll be things moved just a bit as time goes on, but evangelicals of the world should know that this is a vision for what might ultimately lead to this resolution of this conflict. I think we all want a better life for the Palestinian people; we want a path where the Palestinians and the Israelis aren't in conflict. That would be good for the region, good for Jerusalem, good for the world, and I think this plan presents a vision for that but doesn't sacrifice any of these core principles, frankly, of any of the faiths.

QUESTION: As we do rapid fire, let's move to the United States for a moment and anti-Semitism and the Democrats. They seem embroiled in this. There was a – I don't want to say a veiled shot, not that it was a shot, but at Ilhan Omar about the bigotry and anti-Semitism inside the halls of Capitol Hill. What – how concerned are you about the rise of not just anti-Semitism around the world but in that Democrat Party as well?

SECRETARY POMPEO: To see this from a member of Congress like Congresswoman Omar is – I talked about this being dark. The rise of anti-Semitism in the United States and in Europe and in, frankly, all across the world is something that is deeply troubling, and to see someone – a duly elected congressman – behave in that way, to speak about anti-Semitism in that way, is of great concern. It's a great concern to me. This administration speaks the truth, and anti-Semitism is unacceptable in any form from anyone, but to see it come from one of America's leaders is just abhorrent.

QUESTION: Mr. Secretary, back here in the Middle East, you're heading to Lebanon, the last leg of your trip, and yet Lebanon is dominated in many ways by Hizballah, with maybe more than 100,000 rockets, building tunnels into the Northern Galilee, and setting up a military infrastructure on the Golan Heights or trying to, anyway. What can you do and the U.S. do to reduce this threat to Israel and to Lebanon itself?

SECRETARY POMPEO: That's a great question, and that's certainly part of my mission when I travel to Lebanon. It's unfortunate. For the last decade, the previous administration, Hizballah was permitted to grow – to grow its capabilities, to grow its resources almost unchecked, and to seep its way into Lebanese politics. The Lebanese people don't want that. They deserve better. This is a nation with a rich, deep tradition, and so our mission – the reason I'm going there – is to show them what America is prepared to do to help to push back against the threat from Hizballah; to tell them that getting anywhere near Hassan Nasrallah, the leader of Hizballah, is of great risk to their nation; and then to work on some of the security aspects of the relationship as well to make sure they understand the threat that Hizballah's military power inside of Lebanon poses to that entire country.

QUESTION: Staying here in the Middle East, northeast Syria's been in the news a lot in the last couple of months, and you know there's a new democracy there that represents all the people, protects religious freedom and Christians, and even puts a priority on the role of women. What can you tell those people, that new government and many of the Christians there, about what the U.S. will do to protect that new democracy, even as it's surrounded by many countries that are threatening that area?

SECRETARY POMPEO: So when we think about Syria in the Trump administration, we think about the entire region, right, extending from Iraq all the way to the Mediterranean. We were just talking about Lebanon. The challenges in Syria remain. The United States intends to remain. We are close to the destruction of the caliphate. It will be completed very, very soon. But the threat from radical Islamic terrorism continues. And so there will be a required continued effort from the United States to push back against ISIS in the region.

But the work that's been done in Iraq – we forget the days when there were prisoners in cages and beheadings on the beach. It seems distant, but it took enormous work from this administration to take the caliphate down, and now it's in its final throes. There's real work to develop democracy in Iraq, to work to develop an independent, sovereign nation there. We are hard at that, and I am confident that the nations of the region, the Gulf states will all work to make sure that Iraq has an opportunity – an opportunity to be independent from Iran, free and sovereign nation.

QUESTION: Are you encouraged by that new democracy?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Yes. But these things take work. They take work everywhere, and to put that – have that take root here in the Middle East is always a challenge, but we're determined to put our shoulder to the task.

QUESTION: From foreign policy to the Dr. Phil portion of the interview – I can roll in a couch if you like – your faith is very important to you. Can you take me back to West Point? I know there was a time in your life where there was a decision point for you about just following Christ, and our audience would be very interested to hear a little bit more on that.

SECRETARY POMPEO: So I grew up going to church on Sundays, but frankly it wasn't a priority in my life growing up. I went off to West Point, and as a young cadet, during my freshman year there were two young men who were juniors who were true men of faith. And they held these little Bible study/cookie klatches on Sunday afternoons. And they invited all the cadets to see – it was purely voluntary. And I started showing up, and – truly remarkable. I started going to church every weekend on my own, because I wanted to be there to learn and to grow, and at some point during that first year I really did come to have an understanding of Jesus that was different than the one that I had before. It fundamentally changed my life.

QUESTION: And now, as Secretary of State – really before that, as a – well, you called yourself a backbencher from Kansas. It wasn't me earlier. But –

SECRETARY POMPEO: That's a fair description. (Laughter.)

QUESTION: Okay. Look where you are today. But your faith has informed your views, clearly. And not only that, but you're not shy to talk about it. And I'm wondering about how that – how that really manifests in your life.

SECRETARY POMPEO: So of course my mission as a Secretary of State, the thing I rose my – raised my right hand to do, I swore to support and defend the Constitution of the United States. And I've done that now a handful of times – first as a soldier, then as a member of Congress, then as the director of the CIA, now as Secretary of State. But in each of those missions, the task that I have is informed by my understanding of my faith, my belief in Jesus Christ as the savior. It doesn't drive answers and outcomes every day; we all as Christians are searching. But it does inform how I try to treat every human being with dignity and respect in ways that Christians ought to. I don't always live up to that standard, but it does inform the way I think about the world. I think that makes a real difference, and so I want people

to know. It's why I talk about it from to time. I want folks to know the perspective that I am bringing to the challenges in the job that I face, and it also requires me to try to hold myself to the standards that Christians hold themselves out for.

QUESTION: And you also mentioned a Bible story last night when you had your statements with the prime minister. Today's being Purim, a celebration. Jews worldwide and here in Jerusalem are talking about the fact that Esther 2,500 years ago saved the Jewish people with God's help from Haman. And now 2,500 years later there's a new Haman here in the Middle East that wants to eradicate the Jewish people like just like Haman did: the state of Iran. Could it be that President Trump right now has been sort of raised for such a time as this, just like Queen Esther, to help save the Jewish people from the Iranian menace?

SECRETARY POMPEO: As a Christian I certainly believe that's possible. It was remarkable – so we were down in the tunnels where we could see 3,000 years ago, and 2,000 years ago – if I have the history just right – to see the remarkable history of the faith in this place and the work that our administration's done to make sure that this democracy in the Middle East, that this Jewish state remains. I am confident that the Lord is at work here.

QUESTION: Very nice. Secretary Pompeo, thanks so much for doing this.

SECRETARY POMPEO: Thank you.

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