

Press Releases: Remarks on Venezuela

Remarks

Michael R. Pompeo

Secretary of State

Press Briefing Room

Washington, DC

January 25, 2019

SECRETARY POMPEO: Good afternoon, everyone.

Today I am incredibly excited to announce that a seasoned, principled, and tough-minded foreign policy veteran is joining our State Department team.

Elliott Abrams is coming aboard to lead our efforts on Venezuela.

His critical work will get started right away. Tomorrow, he will travel with me to the UN Security Council, where the United States has called a long overdue meeting to urge other nations to support Venezuela's democratic transition.

Elliott's long career in foreign affairs includes a great deal of time as a senior leader in this very organization. Under President Reagan, he served as

assistant secretary of state for human rights and humanitarian affairs and assistant secretary for inter-American affairs as well.

Under President George W. Bush, he served on the National Security Council as the senior director for democracy, human rights, and international affairs; senior director for North African and Near East affairs; and deputy national security adviser for global democracy strategy.

Elliott's passion for the rights and liberties of all peoples makes him a perfect fit and a valuable and timely addition. This week, the Venezuelan people have rejected former President Maduro's illegitimate rule. Consistent with Venezuela's constitution, and with the support of the Venezuelan people and the National Assembly, Juan Guaido has declared himself the interim president of Venezuela.

These are just the first steps on Venezuela's road to liberty. Elliott will be a true asset to our mission to help the Venezuelan people fully restore democracy and prosperity to their country.

On this issue and all others, he is eager to advance President Trump's agenda and promote the ideals and interests of the American people.

And now Elliott would like to say a few words.

MR ABRAMS: Thank you. Very briefly, I left this building 30 years ago this week, last time I worked here. So it's very nice to be back. This crisis in Venezuela is deep and difficult and dangerous, and I can't wait to get to work on it. Thank you.

SECRETARY POMPEO: Thanks.

MR PALLADINO: All right, guys, we've got time for a question or two. Nick Wadhams, Bloomberg, please.

QUESTION: Mr. Secretary.

SECRETARY POMPEO: Yes, sir.

QUESTION: Can you talk a little bit – in a little bit more detail about what Mr. Abrams will be doing, what will his first task be, what will his chief focus be, will he travel to the region? And also, can you talk a little bit about some of the – what will happen to Venezuela's overseas assets? For example, the gold that it has in the Bank of England, money it has in overseas accounts – will the expectation be that the interim president would have control over those funds?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Well, as to your first question, Elliott will have responsibility for all things related to our efforts to restore democracy in Venezuela. It's a global challenge. There are multiple dimensions to how we hope to assist the Venezuelans in achieving democracy there, and he will be responsible for leading that effort.

We have an enormous team here that's done truly remarkable work to date to

get us to the point we are at today, and they've done this over certainly my eight months, but long preceding that as well. I'm incredibly proud of the work that our State Department team has done to date. Elliott will now lead our effort that relates directly to our efforts on behalf of the Venezuelan people.

I would expect, though, that his first task will be to get up to speed and then travel with me to New York tomorrow morning for the UN Security Council meeting. And after that, I couldn't tell you where it will take him. Wouldn't surprise me if he ends up traveling to the region, but what – the road ahead will be driven by the demands of the Venezuelan people and how we can assist them in achieving the outcome that America wants them to achieve.

QUESTION: And on the overseas assets?

SECRETARY POMPEO: On the overseas assets, we'll have announcements from other places later today talking about how it is that we anticipate the interim President Juan Guaido will have the resources he needs to lead the Government of Venezuela forward.

MR PALLADINO: Let's take a question from South America, so NTN. Gustau, please.

QUESTION: NTN 24, Gustau Alegret. Among the countries that has not recognized Juan Guaido as president are Mexico and Uruguay, and both countries has offered their diplomacies in order to help in the crisis. Is the U.S. thinking to work with them, or is the U.S. asking them to recognize Guaido? What's the position of the State Department with these two countries?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Well, we think every country ought to recognize the constitutional leader of Venezuela, and that's who the United States has concluded Juan Guaido is, the interim president of Venezuela. We think every country ought to recognize the Venezuelan constitution, the demands of the Venezuelan people.

So whether it is Mexico or Uruguay or any other country, we hope to work with them to achieve the sense that we can ultimately have a free and fair election in Venezuela, where the voices of the Venezuelan people who, under the Maduro regime, have been starved. Enormous medical and humanitarian situation in Colombia, more than a million refugees have fled the horrors of the Maduro regime. We'll work with all nations to try and achieve that outcome. We think every country ought to take steps towards achieving that, and not side with this cruel dictator in Venezuela who has caused so much devastation for the people of Venezuela.

MR PALLADINO: Wrap it up, sir?

SECRETARY POMPEO: I think one more.

MR PALLADINO: Let's go to *Washington Post*. Carol Morello.

QUESTION: Mr. Secretary, I think a lot of people are concerned about the diplomats who are down there. Would you tell us what you're prepared to do if

tomorrow, when the 72-hour deadline passes, they – the Venezuelans cut off electricity and water, maybe even surround the building, or even try to go in to bring out the diplomats by force? Could you be specific about what you are prepared to do in the event of any of these scenarios? And how can you assure people that they are protected?

SECRETARY POMPEO: I appreciate that question. There's been no activity that's taken more of our time over the past days than ensuring the protection of all those folks that are under our chief of mission authority there in Venezuela. We're working diligently to make sure that they are protected. There's no higher priority for the Secretary of State, and you should know no higher priority for the President of the United States. We have discussed this at some length.

With respect to the way we will deliver that, we've made clear to everyone that it is our expectation that the U.S. officials that are there, that have now been invited to be there by interim President Juan Guaido have a right, they have the privileges and immunities that accrue to having been invited to be there by the duly credentialed leader of Venezuela, and we have every expectation that those rights will continue to be protected.

You would have seen today that we have ordered a – have an ordered departure. We're beginning to move some of our staff out. This is consistent with what the State Department does every day. The first briefing I get every morning is all around the world, every mission, every consulate, every facility where we have officers, I receive a briefing on risk and risk analysis. We'll continue to do that in Venezuela. It is literally a 24/7, moment-by-moment exercise to evaluate risk to the people who work for me in the State Department, and we'll get this right. We will make sure that we protect our folks on the ground and take all appropriate measures to ensure that they're protected.

Thank you.

QUESTION: And if they're not?

MR PALLADINO: Thank you guys.

SECRETARY POMPEO: Thank you all.

MR PALLADINO: Thank you very much.

QUESTION: Has the meeting tomorrow been scheduled at the Security Council?

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[Press Releases: Interview With Laura Ingraham of The Laura Ingraham Show Podcast](#)

Interview
Michael R. Pompeo

Secretary of State

Via Teleconference
January 24, 2019

QUESTION: Joining us now is Secretary of State Mike Pompeo. I'm delighted he's with us. We're going to get the most up-to-date information from him on where this all stands, and he joins us now. Mr. Secretary, thanks for joining us.

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

QUESTION: So the concern now that Politico is writing about is that we're leaving U.S. diplomats in Venezuela, and concern for their safety. We remember of course what happened in Benghazi. What can we do to reassure the American people that our diplomats are going to be safe during this time of tumult?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Laura, you should know, and your listeners should all know, that we are continuously, 24/7, evaluating security conditions. There's no higher priority for the State Department than to keep all the people in our missions safe and secure. And we've made clear to the Maduro regime that it is our expectation that they will be safe and secure. And we will continue to evaluate.

We do this in our missions all across the world every day. We certainly have a real focus here and some of the other places that have greater security threats. But know that we are very focused on this, and we'll make the right decision. What we want to make sure that the – that former President Maduro knows is that he doesn't have the right to make the decision about whether or not we stay there. We now recognize the new, the interim President Guaido, and it is he who has asked us to be there under our diplomatic authority. And it's under that authority that we have the right to continue our diplomatic

mission there in Caracas, in Venezuela. And we will continue to assert that right.

We'll make the right decision about our team and how many and for how long they can stay, but know that we're focused on their security, but that they also have an important mission. The reason we want to be there is because we need a strong, democratic Venezuela where the humanitarian crisis, the disastrous conditions under which Maduro has let his people live for far too long, needs to be changed. And that's the State Department's mission. It's our focus there.

QUESTION: The Russians, not happy about any of this, and they're warning against any military intervention by the United States. Many people concerned about this becoming a flashpoint between the U.S. and Russia, with some larger conflagration happening as a result. And just back to the security issue, if something should be done to threaten our diplomats and we have to go in, are there – is there a concern about triggering any larger conflict with Russia, perhaps even China?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Well, Laura, it is interesting to see how this glorious day yesterday, where the Venezuelan people rose up to take back their country – it's interesting to see how nations aligned. The free countries, the democratic countries of the world – Brazil, Canada, Chile, Ecuador, Peru, Colombia, the list is long – they sided with freedom and democracy. And the folks who landed on the other side were Iran, Russia, and Cuba, along with China. I think that's very telling. I think that tells you a lot about former President Maduro and the kind of kleptocracy that he was running. And our mission, our mission is to make sure that we do everything we can to keep our people safe while continuing to help the Venezuelan people achieve the outcome which they now are responsible for ultimately achieving.

QUESTION: Well, a lot of this has to do with the money that China has loaned Venezuela – \$65 billion in loans. And I think still Venezuela owes them about 20 billion, so China wants its money back, above probably other things that they want, and influence and power in the Southern Hemisphere. They want that influence, and they want their money back, I imagine.

SECRETARY POMPEO: I think that's right. I think the Cubans have been there running the security apparatus for an awfully long time, much to the detriment of the Venezuelan people. And yesterday a new page was turned. And I'm sure that we haven't seen the last of the efforts of the – the last throes of the Maduro regime, the attempt to sustain power. But your – but your listeners just have to know the United States is committed to helping make this democratic transition successful. We just today authorized some additional money to support the International Red Cross and some others to provide humanitarian relief inside the country.

QUESTION: But if something should befall our diplomats, if there is a standoff, you're not ruling out asking the President to send military help into the region, are you?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Laura, we'll do the things we need to do to make sure we

keep our people safe. I don't want to speculate or create a hypothetical situation that we can't account for. But know that the government is fully coordinated. I've spoken with all the other senior leaders in the United States Government just this morning. I spoke with our chief of mission there on the ground last night at 1700 hours. We have a 24/7 operation center up and running. We are fully engaged, we're fully aware of the situation on the ground, and we're prepared to do what it takes to make sure that we do everything we can to keep our people safe.

QUESTION: On the shutdown issue, Mr. Secretary, you now have former DHS secretaries, including the former White House chief of staff John Kelly, urging the President and the Democrats to reopen the government, especially the budget of DHS needing to be funded. What is your reaction to that? Does that put added pressure on President Trump to give in to the Democrats on this entire issue of the shutdown?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Oh, goodness. Look, count me in in hoping that we can find a path forward to get the government back open. I think that'd be a good thing. But this is a political time, and a important set of issues that are being debated. And so I don't see it putting any more pressure on the President than it does on members of Congress. I didn't see the particular report that you're referring to –

QUESTION: It's been all over.

SECRETARY POMPEO: – but know this: The State Department is fully prepared to do the things we need to do. I've talked to people. I traveled last week throughout the Middle East. We have great patriots working for the State Department who understand that democracy is sometimes a little bit messy. That – Vladimir Putin's government never shuts down. It's unlikely that the ayatollah is going to shut down his government. And so we do have a process that sometimes leads to these things that I think everyone wishes didn't take place, but know that the State Department is prepared to do all that we can to continue to work through these difficult, challenging times.

QUESTION: John Kerry over in Davos – I'm sure you heard – he was asked what he would advise the President.

QUESTION: With that final word then, Secretary Kerry, if you had President Trump sitting right opposite you, what would your message to him be?

SECRETARY KERRY: I can't play that – but I know that – you see, because he doesn't take any of this seriously. He doesn't have an ability to have that kind of conversation.

QUESTION: So what would you say to him to get it through? What would your message be?

SECRETARY KERRY: Resign.

QUESTION: Okay.

QUESTION: Your reaction to that, sir?

SECRETARY POMPEO: To be honest with you, Laura, we don't spend a lot of time thinking about what John Kerry says in this administration. Frankly, we're trying to clean up his mess and the mess that the previous administration's left us. I think – I think it's pretty outrageous for a former secretary of state to be calling on a president of the United States to resign, but I suppose, beyond that, this isn't the first time John Kerry has behaved in this way that is inconsistent with what I think former secretaries of state ought to do, and I wish it weren't so.

QUESTION: Yeah. Well, I mean, he's – he could have been prosecuted under the Logan Act for what he did in Iran, trying to do the negotiations ahead of everyone else. So it's rich that he would be saying that.

Mr. Secretary, a lot of people are looking forward to new developments perhaps in our – again, it's a trade stand-off with China. As you know, I've supported this move with trade, taking a hard line given the cheating of China. What can you tell us about potential progress with the Chinese given the huge hit they've taken to their economy, much more pronounced than, of course, it's affected our country?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Yeah. So the slowdown in economic growth in China is very real and severe. There's no doubt about that. President Trump has been, as you know, has been pretty clear: we just want – we just want things to be fair and reciprocal. We want a set of arrangements that allow American workers to have the same opportunity that Chinese workers have. We want – we want our companies to be able to sell their goods into China without the risk that their intellectual property will be stolen or that they'll be forced to deliver their technology to the Chinese Government –

QUESTION: I know. Are we any closer?

SECRETARY POMPEO: – in exchange for the right.

QUESTION: Are we any closer?

SECRETARY POMPEO: I think progress is being made. I'm optimistic that Ambassador Lighthizer and Secretary Mnuchin and the team are going to make real progress. I think it's going to take every day between now and the end of the time period the President allotted to dot the Is and cross the Ts. I hope they can come to an outcome that is one that will be consistent with what President Trump has been demanding now for months and months.

QUESTION: And finally – I know you're out of time – are we making any progress – I know you've been working on this – with our Mexican counterparts, AML0 and his team, to help more with this crush of humanity coming up, another 10,000-person caravan, and what's happening at our southern border still? You saw that video of 500 migrants jumping the fence that the *Daily Mail* has posted. It's shocking. What could you do additionally with our Mexican counterparts to end this constant stream of migrants coming up?

SECRETARY POMPEO: So this is a real challenge. It's an enormous national

security challenge. It's completely appropriate that the Secretary of State is dealing with this, in addition to our Department of Defense and Department of Homeland Security. My mission has been, is to try to get the Mexicans to understand this threat, to take seriously the security issues that surround it, to do what they can at their southern border to discourage the transit across Mexico out of Guatemala and Honduras. We've made a little bit of progress with them; there's just a lot more to do. It was – it's disheartening to see the large numbers, to see these caravans moving out of those countries into Mexico headed for our southern border. When I talked to Foreign Minister Ebrard, he understands our concerns deeply and I'm hopeful in the weeks ahead we'll make real progress in reducing this risk to American national security.

QUESTION: Are you worried about Kamala Harris telling MSNBC last night that we have a President who conducts foreign policy by tweets?

SECRETARY POMPEO: (Laughter.) I'm so worried that I had no idea she'd said it. No. This – our foreign policy is conducted in a way that is thoughtful, deliberative, and then forceful, and I think that's all you can ask from a commander-in-chief. I'm proud to be his Secretary of State.

QUESTION: And are you – are you prepared to tell us there'll be a new summit with North Korea in the next 60 days?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Yeah, there'll be one in the next 60 days. That's the plan.

QUESTION: All right. Well, Mr. Secretary, we really appreciate your spending time with us on the Laura Ingraham Podcast. Really appreciate it. I know how busy you are.

SECRETARY POMPEO: Yes, ma'am.

QUESTION: Thank you so much.

SECRETARY POMPEO: Thank you, Laura. Have a good day.

QUESTION: All right. All right. All the best.

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Press Releases: United States Is Ready To Provide Urgent Humanitarian Aid to the People of Venezuela

Media Note
Office of the Spokesperson

Washington, DC
January 24, 2019

Today, Secretary of State Pompeo announced that the United States is ready to provide more than \$20 million in initial humanitarian assistance to the people of Venezuela as they struggle to cope with severe food and medicine shortages and the other dire impacts of their country's political and economic crisis caused by the illegitimate Maduro regime.

Venezuela's National Assembly has stressed the need for immediate international humanitarian assistance. In response, the United States is ready to provide emergency aid throughout Venezuela to help meet the increasingly urgent humanitarian needs of Venezuelans affected by this crisis.

The United States also continues to provide robust support for response efforts throughout the region as the growing impacts of Maduro's crisis spill into neighboring countries. Since Fiscal Year 2017, the United States has provided more than \$140 million in humanitarian and development assistance to support affected countries' emergency efforts and build their long-term capacity to host the more than three million people who have fled repression and chaos in Venezuela since 2014.

We call on appropriate Venezuelan authorities to immediately implement the critical economic and political reforms necessary to end the hyperinflation, supply shortages, and corruption at the heart of this crisis.

The United States stands with the people of Venezuela and the communities throughout the region that have generously taken in their neighbors during this time of crisis. We commend the contributions of regional governments and all international donors, and encourage additional contributions from the international community to meet growing needs in Venezuela and the region.

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Press Releases: Remarks at the Organization of American States

Remarks

Michael R. Pompeo

Secretary of State

Organization of American States

Washington, DC

January 24, 2019

SECRETARY POMPEO: Thank you very much. The United States is a friend of Venezuela and of the Venezuelan people. We have watched Venezuelans suffer for far too long. We know what they know, that the tyranny of the now defunct

Maduro regime has far too long – for far too long choked the country and its citizens.

Yesterday, in solidarity with the Venezuelan people, and out of respect for Venezuelan democracy, the United States proudly recognized National Assembly President Juan Guaido as the interim president of Venezuela. You've seen the statements from President Trump and from myself.

Many other countries, including a number of OAS states, have also recognized the interim president. We thank them for their support.

It's now time for the OAS as an institution as a whole to do the same. All OAS member states must align themselves with democracy and respect for the rule of law. All member states who have committed to uphold the Inter-American Democratic Charter must now recognize the interim president.

The time for debate is done. The regime of former president Nicolas Maduro is illegitimate. His regime is morally bankrupt, it's economically incompetent, and it is profoundly corrupt. It is undemocratic to the core. I repeat: The regime of former president Nicolas Maduro is illegitimate. We, therefore, consider all of its declarations and actions illegitimate and invalid.

In light of these facts, we call on Venezuelan security forces to ensure the protection of interim President Guaido's physical integrity and his safety. We've seen reports that a number of protesters were killed yesterday and that more than one hundred were arrested, so I reiterate our warning about any decision by remnant elements of the Maduro regime to use violence to repress the peaceful democratic transition.

The United States did not arrive at this conclusion overnight. We came to this conclusion after a long and bitter experience and following a considered assessment of the facts. And we're not alone. The OAS General Assembly has itself agreed to these facts. In June of last year, the OAS General Assembly declared the re-election of former president Maduro an invalid sham. This past January 10th, the OAS Permanent Council declared former president Maduro's second term illegitimate.

Venezuela's National Assembly became the only legitimate, duly and democratically elected body in the country. On January 23rd, National Assembly President Juan Guaido declared himself the interim president of Venezuela, pursuant to Article 333 and 350 of Venezuela's constitution. He made this declaration with the full support of the National Assembly and, most importantly, of the Venezuelan people.

In his public address, interim President Guaido also outlined the steps he plans to take to restore democracy to his country, including free, fair, transparent, and truly democratic elections.

The United States stands solidly behind him. We stand ready to support the efforts of the National Assembly, the Venezuelan people, and the interim president to restore democracy and respect for the rule of law in Venezuela.

We also stand ready to provide humanitarian assistance to the people of

Venezuela as soon as logistically possible. Today, I am announcing that the United States is ready to provide more than \$20 million in humanitarian assistance to the people of Venezuela. These funds are to help them cope with the severe food and medicine shortages and other dire impacts of their country's political and economic crisis. Our announcement of aid is in response to a request from the National Assembly, led by the interim president.

As a friend of the Venezuelan people, we stand ready to help them even more, to help them begin the process of rebuilding their country and their economy from the destruction wrought by the criminally incompetent and illegitimate Maduro regime.

Our support for Venezuela's democratic hopes and dreams is in sharp contrast to the authoritarian regimes across the globe who have lined up to prop up former President Maduro. And there is no regime which has aided and abetted Maduro's tyranny like the one in Havana. Maduro's illegitimate rule was for years sustained by an influx of Cuban security and intelligence officials. They schooled Venezuela's secret police in the dark arts of torture, repression, and citizen control. Maduro was a fine student at the Cuban academy of oppression.

We call on the OAS and all its member states to act on basic, decent, democratic principles and the incontrovertible facts on the ground.

Each of us – each of us – must live up to our calling to promote and defend democracy, as expressed in the tenets of the Inter-American Democratic Charter, to which everyone in this chamber is a signatory.

And we call on all our partners and responsible OAS member states to show leadership and pledge support for Venezuela's democratic transition and for interim President Guaido's pivotal role in that.

We look forward to welcoming Venezuela back into the fold of responsible democratic nations and remaining in our inter-American community. We look forward to welcoming representation of the interim Venezuelan Government to the OAS at the earliest possible opportunity. And we look forward to working with all responsible OAS member states, with the Venezuelan people, our inter-American system, and with the interim government of President Guaido to restore democracy in Venezuela.

We – we each – have a critical opportunity to help the Venezuelan people live free once again. I ask my colleagues to reconvene a meeting of foreign ministers to continue our conversation on the peaceful democratic transition for Venezuela. History will remember whether we help them or not. The United States calls on all nations of the OAS to make the right choice and make that right choice right now. Thank you.

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[Press Releases: Interview With Martha MacCallum of Fox News](#)

Interview
Michael R. Pompeo

Secretary of State

State Department
Washington, DC
January 23, 2019

QUESTION: You said new winds are blowing in the world and they're positive. You pointed to the Brexit example and also to President Trump. Nations matter, borders matter. One headline said, "Mike Pompeo drops an anti-globalist stink bomb ... with a smile."

SECRETARY POMPEO: (Laughter.) Well, I did smile. Martha, it's good to be with you. What I did was try to explain to those who were sitting there in Davos why it is that America has been an enormous force for good over these two years of the Trump administration, how our policies make not only America safer but the whole world, and contribute to economic growth and wealth creation and freedom all around the world. Those were the things I talked about – the importance of the nation-state as the fundamental building block for national security and, frankly, for stability in regions as well.

It can sometimes seem disruptive. It can sometimes seem like America is acting in ways that are causing trouble, but these fundamental premises that the – that were built out over 70 years ago need to be relooked, and that's what President Trump is driving.

QUESTION: That, obviously, brings to mind NATO and a report the other day that the President had said to top national security officials that he didn't necessarily see the point anymore of NATO. Do you agree?

SECRETARY POMPEO: This administration has done more good for NATO than the

previous several administrations combined. The increased resources available for Secretary General Stoltenberg and for NATO partners around the world are significantly greater, approaching now \$100 billion greater than they would have been absent the pressure that President Trump put on. He did that for American national security. That is, we want NATO to be stronger to protect America. But importantly, European nations now are more firmly protected as well.

QUESTION: So it sounds like you think it was a waste of time that the House yesterday went through the process of passing a bill that would reject any effort that the President might make to withdraw from NATO.

SECRETARY POMPEO: Yeah. That's silly.

QUESTION: You look at people like General Mattis and Brett McGurk, who on their way out really made an effort to point out their concerns about the President's adherence to alliances or his confidence in these alliances going forward. And you talk about how the dynamic needs to change – 70 years later, we're in a different world.

SECRETARY POMPEO: President Trump knows that America can't go it alone. We need partners. We've built out coalitions of dozens and dozens of countries to defeat ISIS. We've built an enormous coalition to put pressure on North Korea, to protect not only the United States but Japan, South Korea, and the whole region.

President Trump understands that strong nations will have alliances that work on behalf of their countries and all countries, and so that's what we're trying to do not only with NATO but with every organization around the world. Is it working? Is it delivering security for the American people? If it is, we'll reinforce, and where it's not we'll work to make it better.

This President is committed to ensuring that we have security for the American people, and by that we'll also make sure that the world is safer as well.

QUESTION: But there are some people who ask the question about Article 5. If Montenegro is attacked, should young men and women from the United States fight to defend Montenegro? What's the answer to that?

SECRETARY POMPEO: The answer is coalitions can work when every member of the coalition is doing their fair share. That's how these relationships have worked for an awfully long time. And unfortunately, some countries took a vacation for 20 years and thought that the threats from Russia or from Asia or from all the places in the Middle East and terrorism – they weren't doing what they needed to do to protect their countries. Our urging is this: every country needs to make sure it's contributing enough to make sure that their country is secure, and when they do, America will be with them to support their efforts.

QUESTION: So yes, American soldiers would go to defend Montenegro, if needed?

SECRETARY POMPEO: I'm not going to get into hypotheticals about what might

happen or how a certain scenario might unfold, but make no mistake about it: America has always been there when there were important American and global interests at stake.

QUESTION: With regard to the decision to leave Syria – and it's a gradual decision, is what we're seeing play out – two new attacks over the – one attempted and four killed last week in Syria. How long is the commitment there?

SECRETARY POMPEO: I was with the President over– when our Americans were returned on this past Saturday. It's always difficult to be with those families. These are patriots. These are great Americans who sacrificed their life to help keep America safe. President Trump understands that and respects that commitment. And so in Syria, President Trump has made a tactical decision. We're going to withdraw our 2,000 uniformed military personnel from that country, but make no mistake about it: the defeat of the caliphate, the ISIS caliphate in Syria, is almost complete. We're going to stay there till it's done. This threat from radical Islamic terrorism is a global threat, and America will posture itself in a way to ensure that we're doing all that we can to protect the American people from that threat.

QUESTION: So not on the ground, bombing from a distance – is that the way you see it in the future?

SECRETARY POMPEO: I think what President Trump will do is he'll – we'll look at each situation and make the best decision on how to approach it. If it requires American forces to be someplace, we'll do that. President Trump very much wants to end these long, drawn-out – 17 years now in Afghanistan. He says let's find a way to achieve the ends to protect Americans from the threat from radical Islamic terrorism, but let's see if we can do it in a way that is sustainable and makes sense.

QUESTION: What do you say to those like Brett McGurk, who I mentioned before, who say that no one's happier than Russia and Iran when they hear the news that the United States is pulling out of Syria, and likely in the near-term future out of Afghanistan as well?

SECRETARY POMPEO: It's a great question. Let's talk about happiness in Iran and Russia. What is Russia seeing from the Trump administration? Hundreds of sanctions, an enormous military buildup by the United States of America, a missile posture – a missile defense review that makes sure that America will be capable of defending itself not only next year but 20 years from now. I assure you that none of these things sat well with Vladimir Putin.

Let's talk about Iran. Do you think they're happy that the largest set of sanctions ever emplaced on an economy – that is likely to fall into recession by the spring of this year – makes the Iranians happy? To see the global coalition against Iran that has been put in place – not only Arab countries, but countries from Asia and Africa will join us in February in Warsaw for a ministerial that will address Middle East stability and Iran.

I don't think for one moment those two countries believe they're in a better

place today with the Trump administration than they were with Barack Obama and John Kerry in charge of this country.

QUESTION: So John Kerry, former Secretary of State, was in Davos. He was asked what advice he would give to President Trump.

[A video was played.]

SECRETARY POMPEO: I must tell you, we don't pay much attention to the advice that Secretary Kerry's providing to our administration. We're doing our best to clean up the failures that occurred on his watch.

QUESTION: With regard to pulling out of Syria and Afghanistan – that's the plan as well, right, to pull out of Afghanistan?

SECRETARY POMPEO: I'm not going to comment on the future plans and intentions in any of those places. The President will make those announcements when the time is right.

QUESTION: So what do you say to those who look back at Bush doctrine, that it's better to fight them there than fight them here? That was the post-9/11 –

SECRETARY POMPEO: Well, Martha, we are. But we are. We are. We took down a caliphate that grew in the previous administration. You remember, Martha. You remember the pictures of people kneeling on beaches and people in cages on fire. This is the space, this is the real estate that ISIS built out prior to the time that the Trump administration came into office. And we literally are in the last set of square kilometers in Syria. We're done in Iraq with the real estate; we took back Mosul. We still have work to do. ISIS and the threat from terrorism remains, to be sure. But we made enormous progress, and we did it there.

QUESTION: You're a former military man. What do you say to those who look at the Kurds who fought alongside us, who don't want to be abandoned there and who feel very vulnerable if we leave their side?

SECRETARY POMPEO: I think the President was very clear about his expectation with how the Kurds will need to be treated after the time that the U.S. military personnel depart. We understand the work that they did alongside of us. It was enormously important and good work, and we're going to ensure that the Kurds have a proper place in Syria after our departure.

QUESTION: And you think that Turkey will abide by that?

SECRETARY POMPEO: I've had lots of conversations. I think we have a way forward.

QUESTION: North Korea. Some look at North Korea and remember the meeting, the first meeting that the President had with Kim Jong-un – shaking hands, President came back, he said no doubt in his mind that the denuclearization process was underway and that it would absolutely happen. Now there are reports that there's a new top-secret missile base, and perhaps 19 new

missiles that we can't identify the locations of. Is that progress?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Let me start by saying the American people should be – should rest assured that the United States understands deeply what's taking place in North Korea. Sometimes things pop in press reports and folks act like it's news. The American people should understand that the United States Intelligence Community and our security apparatus knows full well what activities are taking place and, frankly, which ones aren't.

With respect to the negotiation –

QUESTION: Are you saying that those are not taking place?

SECRETARY POMPEO: I just want the American people to understand that the United States Intelligence Community is fully aware of what's going on in North Korea and those things which are not. I don't comment on U.S. intelligence substantively.

Second, with respect to the negotiations, President Trump and I have both, for the – from the very beginning, from the first time I went to North Korea as the CIA director, understand that this is going to be a process that is going to take some time. First step: stopping their testing of their missile program. Second step: stopping their nuclear tests. Those still continue. There's been real progress made. There are many conversations going on. Chairman Kim continues to assure the President of the United States he is intent on denuclearization, and I hope that at the end of February, when the two leaders get together, we can make a substantial step along the way.

QUESTION: Quick question for you on Kansas politics. A lot of speculation out there that you might consider running for Pat Roberts' seat. There were reports that you spent some time over the weekend with Republican strategist Ward Baker to discuss that possibility, and that Mitch McConnell is urging you to run.

SECRETARY POMPEO: Lots of folks have reached out to me and suggested I ought to do that. I have suggested to them that I have a very full plate as Secretary of State, and I intend to keep doing this so long as President Trump will commit to it.

QUESTION: So no intention to get involved in the Senate race in Kansas?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Martha, every day I'm trying to make sure that I'm doing what President Trump wants me to do to keep America safe. That's my singular focus.

QUESTION: Is Mitch McConnell trying to change your mind about that? I know that Kris Kobach, who lost the governor's race there, is considered a possibility to run for that seat.

SECRETARY POMPEO: I spoke to Senator McConnell once. He asked me if I'd think about it, and I told him I appreciated the phone call.

QUESTION: Would you support Kris Kobach if he decides to run in that seat?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Martha, I'm so far out of politics. I think it might even be a federal violation if I answered that question, so I'm going to just say I appreciate your interest.

QUESTION: Secretary Pompeo, thank you very much.

SECRETARY POMPEO: Thank you, Martha.

QUESTION: Great to be with you today.

SECRETARY POMPEO: Wonderful to be with you as well.

QUESTION: Thanks for your time.

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