

RELEASE IN FULL

UNEDITED - FOR INTERNAL USE

**INTERVIEW OF SECRETARY OF STATE MICHAEL R. POMPEO
WITH FAITH-BASED MEDIA**

March 18, 2019
Via Teleconference

SECRETARY POMPEO: Great. I'll be very quick, and then I'll take as many questions as I can. First, thanks for joining me on the phone call. I'm happy to talk about whatever's on your mind. I'm here in Kansas today working on a – with a group of folks on entrepreneurship, freedom and liberty. I'm in Kansas, so I'm home, so I'm in a really good space, a good mood. And then I head out here in just a few hours. I'll take a trip where the first stop is in Kuwait to meet with their leadership, traveling then to Tel Aviv and Jerusalem, and then on to Beirut. Different missions, different places, but in each place very focused on not only the security aspects of the relationship between our countries and the economic aspects, but also the challenges we face from radical Islamic terrorism in the region, and working to promote religious tolerance in each of those places as well.

And with that, I'm happy to take questions.

QUESTION: Yeah, this is Ron Kampeas from the Jewish Telegraphic Agency. How are you?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Hi Ron, I'm good. How are you?

QUESTION: I'm good. So in 2016, right before the U.S. elections when Benjamin Netanyahu was here, he took pains to meet with both nominees in order to show that he doesn't – didn't favor one or the other. You're going to be hard by the Israeli elections, like just barely two weeks before them. Are you going to be meeting with the Israeli opposition leader, Benny Gantz? Are you going to – are you concerned at all that you're giving the impression that you're giving Netanyahu a boost in these elections?

SECRETARY POMPEO: We haven't released my full schedule yet and we don't intend to for a bit. But I – my travel is something that has been long planned. I had to wave off a previous trip because of a personal commitment that I had to fulfill back here in the United States. And so I'm not worried about what someone may say. I'm going there to meet with the leadership in Israel on a set of incredibly important issues that are time sensitive. The threats in the region are real. There – radical Islamic terrorism, the threat from the Islamic Republic of Iran, are something that we work closely with our Israeli partners. That's the focus of my visit, it's what we'll talk about, and it's the work that I'll do while I'm on the ground there.

QUESTION: Okay. Are you going to be mentioning the Golan or seeing the Golan Heights at all?

SECRETARY POMPEO: I'm not going to foreshadow the remarks that I'll make while I'm there.

UNEDITED – FOR INTERNAL USE

3/18/2019

2

QUESTION: Okay. Thank you.

SECRETARY POMPEO: Thank you, sir.

QUESTION: Hi, this is Emily McFarlan Miller from Religion News Service. I was wondering about the State Department report that was released last week that no longer uses the word “occupation” in regards to the Golan Heights, the West Bank, and Gaza. I was wondering if you can talk about what prompted this change, and if this is a hint at what we can expect in the upcoming peace plan from the White House.

SECRETARY POMPEO: So that – the language that we use we think most accurately reflects the facts. The Human Rights Report itself, as you well know, is a congressionally mandated document. Its mission set is to lay out facts. It is to lay out what’s going on. It’s not a policy document, it doesn’t intend to be; it simply documents human rights abuses around the world and attempts to provide a baseline upon which not only here in the United States but countries all around the world can measure their own performance, the performance of others. And so the language we chose to use there was the result of our determination that that most factually represented the reality on the ground.

QUESTION: Okay. And I know that the White House recently hosted a meeting with Evangelical leaders about this peace plan. I was wondering if you could talk about why that constituency is important to this process.

SECRETARY POMPEO: Well, I’ll leave to the White House to talk about their meeting, and I’ll say only this: As an Evangelical Christian myself, I have – I’ve always understood the centrality of that place. I think many Evangelical leaders believe that as well. We know that the Abrahamic traditions all value Jerusalem, and so I’m confident that when the administration is thinking about how it is we might finally achieve the Middle East peace that the world has been demanding for decades, I think persons of all faiths who live today in Israel and can worship freely – I think persons of all faiths will have something to say about the plan and if it makes sense. So we’re doing our best to make sure and have a broad base of people have an understanding of the plan as we will present it.

QUESTION: Thank you.

SECRETARY POMPEO: I think it’s that straightforward.

MODERATOR: Do we have a next question?

QUESTION: Yeah, hi. This is Dovid Efuno from Algemeiner. I’ll jump in here.

SECRETARY POMPEO: Yes, of course, sir.

QUESTION: Thank you. So question about under your direction, the State Department has taken a number of steps to try and convince the Palestinian leadership to stop the funding for

UNEDITED – FOR INTERNAL USE

3/18/2019

3

terror groups or those that have committed terror acts and their families, those that are – some in Israeli prisons, (inaudible) the Taylor Force Act, and some other steps that the State Department took. Reported late last month that the Palestinian Authority sent a letter directly to you rejecting U.S. aid and also stressing in a meeting with congressional leaders, it was reported, that if they had – if we only had 20 or 30 million shekels, which is what is paid monthly to families of martyrs, we will give that money to the families of martyrs. So considering the steps that have been taken, and so the lack of progress in this area, are there further steps the United States or the State Department is considering taking, taking, or could take to try and end this practice, which I understand is ultimately the goal, of incentivizing terrorism against Israelis?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Well, it is certainly our objective. It is a legal requirement as well, with the Taylor Force Act and other requirements. We – it's also the case that we're focused not only in that theater but all around the world doing all that we can to reduce terrorism. It's pretty straightforward. And so I'm not going to foreshadow what other actions we might take in this particular matter, but know this: We're determined to get every country to cease underwriting terrorist acts. We're – we want every peoples to live in freedom without fear of having terror rained down upon them. That's certainly the case of Palestinian terror into Israel. It's the case of terror all around the world. I work on it all around the world nearly every day, and it often is the case that one of the best ways to get at a problem, the problem of terrorism, is to stop the money, stop the resources from flowing towards those who are engaged in those terror acts.

QUESTION: Thank you.

MODERATOR: And next question, please. Do we have another question for the Secretary?

QUESTION: Yes, Joe Bollig from *The Leaven*, Archdiocese of Kansas City in Kansas. Some commentators have said when it comes to the issue of Islamic radicalism that of course we're opposed to that ideology and the violence that results from it. But there seems to be a kind of a lacking of an ideological fight against this sort of thing, like we did against Nazism during World War II or communism during the Cold War. We have introduced troops in Iraq and Afghanistan, and in other places we have our troops advising and supporting. But there doesn't seem to be a comprehensive and coordinated opposition to Islamic radicalism on at least an ideological level as far as I can tell. I could be wrong, but please tell me what's happening in that regard.

SECRETARY POMPEO: So it is, in the end, an important part of being successful. We can take down caliphates, we can just take away resources, all of those are good steps. In the end, one has to get to the prime driver, which is this idea of extremism as a way to achieve a political ends. That certainly extends to radical Islamic terrorism in particular, but it's broader than that. The administration has a number of programs aimed at just that.

We also know that it often is the case that we're going to have to turn to other nations to do that, that operate in that space inside of their cultures, inside of their religions. We're going to depend on those countries to cease allowing radicalism to take place in their mosques or elsewhere in madrasas. It is an imperative that this not be taught, no be fomented, and not be tolerated in each of those countries as well. And we have a very robust effort to work with other countries to

UNEDITED – FOR INTERNAL USE

3/18/2019

4

ensure that they understand that that is part of the relationship between our nation and theirs, which is our understanding that they will not themselves promote or permit extremism inside of their country. To get at that extremist ideology is a central understanding of what we're trying to do. It is a difficult problem, but one that we are incredibly focused on.

QUESTION: Thank you.

SECRETARY POMPEO: Thank you, sir.

MODERATOR: And with that, it looks like we have time for one more question.

QUESTION: Secretary Pompeo, this is Mindy Belz from WORLD Magazine.

SECRETARY POMPEO: Hi, Mindy.

QUESTION: And I want to ask you about Syria. Hi. I know that you won't actually be there, but you'll certainly, I imagine, be having discussions. The State Department announced I believe close to 400 million in additional humanitarian aid to the region. I'm just curious what some of your conversations – what you anticipate will be. Will you be focused on the area of northeastern Syria, where we've seen so much fighting recently? Are you going to be speaking more broadly? How is the U.S., and particularly from the diplomatic, humanitarian side, going to be engaging on the question of Syria at this juncture?

SECRETARY POMPEO: So we have many elements of our diplomatic policy on the Middle East and in Syria in particular. You asked even more specifically with respect to humanitarian assistance in Syria. So it'll be broadly aimed – that is, not just in the east or just in the northeast. We're going to try and reach all of those places which require humanitarian assistance, where there is a need for food, medicine, and often water. And it's not just the material; they often need docs and medical care as well, expertise and training. But – and we aim to deliver that more broadly.

It is still the case that there are many pockets which are difficult for us to reach, places that have regime control that getting humanitarian assistance is incredibly difficult, and so much harder for us to do that. We are determined to use the taxpayer-provided resources for humanitarian assistance in a way that actually delivers good outcomes, but you should know we remain in step, as are our European partners, that until such time as the political process moves forward, until such time as the Syrian regime and the Russians and the Iranians understand that there has to be a political solution in Syria where many voices will be heard from and that political fault lines, divides can be hashed out and discussed, money for reconstruction of Syria simply is not going to be made available.

QUESTION: Would that include support for the Syrian Democratic Forces in the northeast and more support for that particular entity there? There's been a question about that.

UNEDITED – FOR INTERNAL USE

3/18/2019

5

SECRETARY POMPEO: So we have teams working on that issue as well. We're trying to make sure that we have a stable outcome as between the Turks and the forces in Syria along the Syrian-Turkish border. It's an important political, diplomatic outcome. There'll be a military component to that as well. And then at the end, the United Nations Security Council Resolution 2254 must be implemented. For large-scale reconstruction to come into the country, to begin to rebuild what has caused over 6 million Syrians to be displaced from their homes is going to require the Assad regime to engage in a political resolution of that conflict. There's just – there's simply no other way that the Western world is going to be able to move forward there.

QUESTION: Okay. Thank you.

SECRETARY POMPEO: Thank you, ma'am.

MODERATOR: And thank you, everyone, for your time today. Secretary Pompeo, any last words?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Great. No, nothing left. Thank you all for spending time with me. I look forward to talking to you upon my return from the trip as well. Thank you all.

QUESTION: Thank you.

###