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Interview
Michael R. Pompeo

Secretary of State

U.S. Embassy
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QUESTION: Mr. Secretary, Mike Pompeo, thank you so much for your time and good to see you.

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

QUESTION: Thank you. Let's start with your tough speech yesterday. You mentioned the Lebanese people should be brave and stand up against Hizballah. What can they do to face this strong group? Is Washington willing to go further steps to help if they do so?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Yes, the good news is that my meetings here have shown that the Lebanese people are prepared to do this. They are prepared and they understand that their sovereignty and their independence depends on their own efforts.

I love this place. I love Lebanon. It is a special place in the Middle East. It is a democracy with enormous religious diversity, and that's why allowing Hizballah – funded by the Islamic Republic of Iran – is so dangerous. It's the threat that is posed to all those people, Christians and Muslims, people from a broad range of understandings and experiences to – people from the north, people from the Bekaa, all across Lebanon. We must all get this right. The United States is prepared to support that effort. We want our good partners in Lebanon to understand that we're with them in this battle and that they don't have to allow the Islamic Republic of Iran to underwrite a terrorist organization that infiltrates inside of their country.

QUESTION: Last night you gave a speech that's considered to be the pointed speech probably since you took office as Secretary of State. What led up to that?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Oh, I don't know about that. What President Trump and our administration tries to do is speak the truth, to call out facts, to engage

in a very realistic diplomatic effort to achieve the outcomes that we know every nation wants. This trip started in Kuwait and then traveled to Israel and came here. I was in the Middle East before that. I think I was in six or seven countries. Each one of those – each one of those nations wants America to help. They understand that we are a force for good in the region, and they want that help to assist them in stronger government, stronger institutions, and more capable resources to help their own people, and America is prepared to do that in each and every case.

QUESTION: You also said in your speech last night that Washington would continue to use all peaceful means possible to pressure Hizballah. Is Washington considering to expand sanctions to include Lebanese political figures close to Hizballah?

SECRETARY POMPEO: I never get ahead of the President with respect to who or what entities we might designate or which tools we might use, but I want the Lebanese people to understand that we're prepared to use all peaceful tools that the United States has in conjunction with and we'll work alongside our Lebanese partners to ensure that we get the right outcomes. If that involves sanctioning particular individuals, we're prepared to do that. If it means more American diplomatic engagement, we're prepared to do that as well. We want allies and partners in the region to be part of this too. It's a campaign in helping the Lebanese people have this one – this wonderful, diverse, great democracy that is so vital for peace and stability throughout the entire Middle East.

QUESTION: You're not worried that more sanctions could lead to hurting the Lebanese economy?

SECRETARY POMPEO: We don't want that. Indeed, we want just the opposite. I was with a group of folks yesterday talking about the Lebanese economy and how more American businesses might invest, how we might help the Lebanese economy grow. We certainly want that. We think a healthy, thriving Lebanese economy is good for the very peace and stability that I've been speaking about here this morning.

QUESTION: After your meetings with Aoun and Berri and Bassil on one side and Hariri and Hassan and Jumblatt and Geagea on the other side, have you sensed a unified opinion among them about Hizballah?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Yes, I have. I think they all understand the importance of keeping the political power out of the hands of the Islamic Republic of Iran. It's been a consistent theme, something each leader I've spoken with has talked about.

QUESTION: See, some sources was mentioning that you were not happy after your meeting with Bassil. What happened exactly?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Oh, I don't know who those folks are. We had a fine meeting. We had a conversation like all of my conversations yesterday that were very frank, that were very candid. That's what friends do: they talk about how to move forward, how to work together. Where there are differences,

you try to resolve them – you make sure others understand your point of view. Every one of my counterparts yesterday did that. No, I thought each of the meetings I had yesterday was constructive and productive.

QUESTION: Let's talk about Syrian refugees. Some – you always mention you want a safe return for displaced Syrian refugees to their home, but might – the peaceful solution might take years and the Lebanese economy (inaudible) as well. Would you encourage a dialogue between the Lebanese president and Bashar Assad on this matter?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Well, I'll stay out of that. That's a decision for the Lebanese leadership to make. I will say this: I visited – it's been a little while ago – I had a chance to visit some of these refugees in the Bekaa Valley. I watched the graciousness, the nobleness of how Lebanon is treating these refugees. They were running after-school sessions, helping to educate the young people who have come here, displaced persons who were in a really bad place. Lebanon should be incredibly proud of what it has done to take care of these refugees. The United States appreciates the burden this has put on the Lebanese economy, and our mission in Syria is to get a political resolution such that the safe and voluntary return of these people can take place just as soon as possible.

QUESTION: It was a pleasure talking with you, Mr. Secretary.

SECRETARY POMPEO: Thank you.

QUESTION: Thank you so much.

SECRETARY POMPEO: Thank you. Great to see you.

QUESTION: Yes, thank you.

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