

Press Releases: Interview With Gisella Lopez of El Comercio

Interview
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Secretary of State

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QUESTION: The main topic of your visit is to discuss the situation of Venezuela. For how long is it possible to intensify the diplomatic pressure?

SECRETARY POMPEO: So the main topic of my visit to South America is really twofold: first, to be with our friends, democratic countries with free markets; to make sure they understand that we're a good partner and to talk about trade relationships and the like, but also to talk about the threat to those countries from the disaster that is Venezuela, the humanitarian crisis that is Venezuela, the – caused purely by the political disaster that is Nicolas Maduro. So those were the two reasons for my visit.

As for how long this can go, I don't know how much longer the Venezuelan people will tolerate this. My guess is not much. The devastation wrought by Nicolas Maduro, the tragedy of the humanitarian situation there brought out solely by Maduro making the choice to bring in the Cubans, to allow Russians to intervene in the country – those are the things that are destroying the lives of young people in Venezuela, and I'm very hopeful that Maduro will understand that his time is coming soon.

QUESTION: But it's not only up to the Venezuelan people. It's also the – your relationships in the countries in South America and also the United States have the contribution with President Guaido – Interim President Guaido right now. But the military option is always still on the table despite this – the South American group of Lima are against this possibility?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Well, to your point, the Venezuelan people have spoken. They chose Juan Guaido through the National Assembly and their own constitution. So it is ultimately up to the Venezuelan people. The Lima Group, the OAS are providing enormous support. United States stands ready to continue to support them, and the Venezuelan people will ultimately convince the leadership that they must go, that there's no future for Maduro. And the military –

QUESTION: But it's taking – it's taking too long.

SECRETARY POMPEO: Yes, I agree. It's taken years. This is not something that has happened in the last weeks or months. This is a devastation wrought by the Cubans, the Russians, and Maduro over the last years. So I agree it's taken too long. I'm very hopeful that it'll come to its conclusion quickly.

Your last question was about all options on the table. That remains the case.

QUESTION: So in the late administrations, the United States didn't seem to be so interested in Latin America political situation, but now there is a change. The Venezuela situation is the reason for that change?

SECRETARY POMPEO: No, not at all. The reason for that change is that President Trump understands how important South America, Central America, Mexico, Canada, all of the Western Hemisphere are to the United States of America, so he has tasked us to be engaged, to work with those countries, develop trade between those countries. We have great democracies now. That has not always been the case in South America. We have free market economies that understand the rule of law, transparency. That has not always been the case. So we view this as an enormous opportunity, and you see. You see it in the actions of the OAS and Lima Group. They are leading to restore basic, fundamental systems – water, food systems, to provide humanitarian (inaudible) in Venezuela. This is a real opportunity for the United States to continue to engage with our friends in South America. President Trump is very focused on it.

QUESTION: So the new governments in South America is the reason you say that this is the change –

SECRETARY POMPEO: No, there's just opportunity. There's real opportunity both for those countries to sell their goods into the United States, for the United States to sell our products here, and to grow and expand. America always supports democratic institutions, the rule of law, transparency, our core value sets. These are the value sets that are continuing to grow and expand in South America. We want to encourage that and we want to partner with those nations.

QUESTION: So in your (inaudible) visiting with President Vizcarra, you congratulate him for the fight against the corruption. It's a big issue now in our country. What is the perception about Peru? It's a country with some of the former presidents in jail. What is this perception?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Yeah, from the – America's perspective, fighting corruption is an important element of what I just talked about, to have a true democracy, to have people have the representatives they choose and know that they're acting on behalf of the people and not on behalf of themselves or the business that they are a shareholder of. So fighting corruption is a central part of democratic institutions and free markets, and so I wanted to applaud President Vizcarra for the work that he has done to continue to battle against corruption.

QUESTION: But in this topic, it's not uncomfortable for your administration to have a runaway president like Toledo two years in your country?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Yeah, I can't comment on things that relate to our judicial process.

QUESTION: I know. My question is about the situation, because this is really like two years and – ago that a former president is escaping from our justice.

SECRETARY POMPEO: We think corruption should be fought at every level. With respect to any particular case or any particular name, I can't comment.

QUESTION: But you also talk about China and Russia, and China's our main commercial partner, and also Russia has ties in our region, in Latin America for so many years. (Inaudible.)

SECRETARY POMPEO: Yes, there were many communist countries in Latin America for many years, but that's the great thing that's changed. This idea, this idea of the totalitarian, Orwellian state of communism is being rejected by the people of South America. It's glorious.

QUESTION: So the United States now with your administration want to change the situation and to compete with China, Russia in Latin America?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Well, we welcome all nations to compete in free markets openly and transparently. We always have. We're convinced that democratic values and institutions, the things that we care so deeply about – basic human rights, things that don't exist in China – I think the South American people see that. They see the horrors of a million Uighurs being held in China. They see the Orwellian information state, the police state that China is becoming. They see that communism has failed the Russian people. I think the people of South America get that they should interact with, do business with, and partner with countries that share their value sets: freedom, faith, liberty, rule of law. Those are fundamental values that are held by people right here in this country and I think all throughout South America.

QUESTION: But I think it's very hard to compete with – China's a big economy and has ties with our region for so many years, many decades.

SECRETARY POMPEO: Make no mistake, if China's here to compete and offer their goods for service through private enterprise, we welcome that. That's not problematic. United States does a great deal of commercial business with China. The challenge with China is when private entities show up, they're coming for a malign activity all too often, and that's what we've asked every country to be aware of. State-owned enterprises, companies deeply connected to the Chinese Government that want to put infrastructure, telecommunications infrastructure inside of your country – we want to make sure everyone has their eyes wide open that there's real risk to the Peruvian people. If those systems are installed, if those networks are placed with Huawei technology or Chinese technology, your information is in the hands of President Xi and the People's Liberation Army in China. I don't think the people of Peru want

that, and we want to make sure that everyone understands the risks when they engage in that kind of activity with China.

QUESTION: Also it is interesting for me, that question. Is difficult for you to be the chief of the diplomacy in your country when your president doesn't – Trump is not so – doesn't use so much the diplomacy in foreign relations because he is very straight to the point?

SECRETARY POMPEO: No, I'm just like that, just as I'm with you today. I'm very straight to the point, right? It's important for diplomats, partners, with our friends, to speak the truth to them, to share with them the very real concerns and to thank them when they take real actions that are consistent with their countries' values and demonstrate a willingness to partner with the United States of America. No, I think accurate, factual, blunt talk is valued, and I will tell you that as I travel the world, my partners, whether it's my counterparts in the foreign – in the ministries around – foreign ministries around the world or when I speak with folks like President Vizcarra, they share with me their frank and blunt views, and I think that's the best way to advance our joint interests.

QUESTION: Now you're leaving Lima and traveling to Colombia. What are your expectations in Cucuta? Because you're seeing the frontier from Colombia, Venezuela, with the humanitarian –

SECRETARY POMPEO: Yeah. So I've been to Colombia previously as the Secretary of State. Today I'll travel to a different part of Colombia, a place where the world joined together, an enormous coalition joined together to try to bring food and medicine to the people of Venezuela – medicine for the sick, food for the poor. The only people who have prevented that are the Russians, the Chinese, and Maduro. We want to talk about that. We want to make sure the world knows that the United States stands with them, that we stand with countries in South America, that we stand with the Venezuelan people. We are prepared to provide assistance to them when the time is right. We're prepared to do it today. If that food and that medicine could get in today, we would love nothing more than to help the sick and the starving.

QUESTION: What about the relationships and the relation with Peru? With – I want to talk about that, because we also have ties, not only investment and in the commercial, but also cultural relationships. I want to talk about that.

SECRETARY POMPEO: Yeah, they're deep, important, relationships, right. We signed a free trade agreement. Now 10 years on, our commercial trade has nearly doubled. I hope we will double it again faster than the next 10 years, and your point is right, too – we share deep cultural relationships as well. We share value sets. It's a special day here. Easter's a week off from today. Today is Palm Sunday. Our common set of understandings about democracy and freedom, a deep desire for liberty, are things that our two nations share, and it bodes well for our continuing strengthening relationship in the years ahead.

QUESTION: Well, I think it's – thank you so much for your time. This was a very short time, but it's –

SECRETARY POMPEO: Yes, ma'am. Thank you for your time. No, I appreciate that. Thank you very much for your time. Thank you.

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