

Press Releases: Interview With Lester Holt of NBC News

Interview
Michael R. Pompeo

Secretary of State

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QUESTION: Mr. Secretary, thank you for joining us. Let me begin by asking: Did the U.S. either tacitly or actively encourage this uprising?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Lester, we've supported the Venezuelan people for an awfully long time now. We have done all that we can to implore the Maduro regime to depart. We've recognized Juan Guaido as the interim president of Venezuela, and we are continuing to work to support the Venezuelan people to restore democracy there, Lester. You've seen the terrible human rights situation, the disastrous condition of the nation with starving people, kids that can't get medicine. We're doing everything we can to support Juan Guaido and the National Assembly there in Venezuela.

QUESTION: But is this how you want it to play out, with violence on the streets, a public uprising?

SECRETARY POMPEO: We've said all along we want this to be a peaceful transition. We regret that the Maduro regime has resorted to violence. And you should know and the American people should know we're going to hold all of those in the Maduro regime, all the thugs, all those around him, whether they be Venezuelans or Cubans or Russians, those that engaged in violence will have a special place as America evaluates how this unfolded.

QUESTION: Mr. Guaido seemed to imply today when he made this call for an uprising that he had the support of the military. That is in question at this hour. What is your understanding of the situation on the ground, and could this fail?

SECRETARY POMPEO: So Lester, it's very fluid, to be sure. It is the case that we're aware that senior leaders that are at least for the moment still with Maduro though it's difficult to tell – folks like the defense minister, Mr. Moreno, the head of the supreme court, the head of the presidential guard – each of those had indicated they were prepared to abandon Maduro. They made that very clear to other members of the opposition. And today they haven't

indicated that as clearly. We're hopeful that as the day wears on they'll honor the commitment that they had made to the opposition, that they understood that Maduro days were numbered and that was not the best direction for them to go.

QUESTION: I know you and the President have been asked this a lot, but given the situation on the ground right now, would the U.S. intervene militarily here?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Yes, we've said very clearly all along that we're going to do all that we can for the Venezuelan people and restore democracy, that we want this to be a nonviolent transition. And you should know there's already been an intervention. There's already been a military intervention by the Cubans and by the Russians, right. This is the duly elected by the Venezuelan people – the National Assembly and Juan Guaido are the duly elected government. And so when the Russians came in at the behest of Maduro, they were not there with the consent of the government, and the Cubans are the ones protecting Maduro today. That's wrong. It's not consistent with Venezuelan democracy, and the United States is determined to keep every option on the table to restore that democracy.

QUESTION: But looking at the situation as it is now, if this uprising fails, if it stalls, would U.S. troops come in and tip the scales?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Look, Lester, I've answered the question about the military option still remaining viable. We're working diligently. I'm the Secretary of State. Our task is to make this a political and diplomatic resolution. We've been working on this for months. We've made enormous progress, and we're hoping that progress continues.

QUESTION: Have you or anyone in the administration you're aware of spoken to Mr. Guaido in the last 24, 48 hours?

SECRETARY POMPEO: We're talking to lots of folks on the ground, Lester. I don't want to get into who all we've had a chance to speak with today, but we've continually spoken with Juan Guaido all throughout this. You see too, you see that Juan Guaido is in the streets, and we've not seen Mr. Maduro since this morning. We did see his airplane. It was parked at the airport. We understand that he was actually getting ready, contemplating leaving the country, and the Russians told him to stay, not to depart for Havana.

QUESTION: That's based on American intelligence?

SECRETARY POMPEO: We have good information that confirms that fact.

QUESTION: All right. Mr. Secretary, we appreciate you spending some time with us. Good to see you.

SECRETARY POMPEO: Thank you, Lester.

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