

Press Releases: Interview With Tuomas Niskakangas of Helsingin Sanomat

Interview
Michael R. Pompeo

Secretary of State

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QUESTION: Secretary Pompeo, it's – those were some pretty frank words about China's arctic policies. Why did you decide to be so frank on the speech you just gave?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Well, first of all, I'm always frank. It's my duty to do so, not only my duty as the Secretary of State, but it's an obligation as a participant on the Arctic Council to be straightforward and candid about things you see and observe. And that's all I did today was lay down some basic facts that are indisputable about Chinese activities, Chinese history, Chinese practices, and share them and present them as something that we ought to have conversations about how to make sure that China's participation in this region is appropriate and lawful.

QUESTION: Yes. And also from your speech, you talked about the environment without mentioning climate change. Is that something you hope to do also tomorrow when it comes to the policy statement from this meeting, that we should care about the environment but not to put too much weight on climate change?

SECRETARY POMPEO: My view on this and President Trump's view on this is what we should put all our emphasis on is outcomes. And we can call it whatever we like, but I shared some of the data in the speech. The United States is kicking it when it comes to getting its CO2 down. I mean, compare it to China, compare it to Russia, compare it – frankly – to many European nations, each of whom signed the Paris agreement.

And I'm sure it was a good party. I'm sure it felt good to sign the agreement. But at the end of the day, what matters to human health, what matters to the citizens of the world, is that we actually have an impact on improving health. And our technology, our innovation, the R&D we put in in the United States, that's what will drive better climatic outcomes, that's

what will create cleaner air and safer drinking water, and that's what I hope the whole world will focus on.

QUESTION: Okay, I want to talk briefly about your bilateral meeting with Minister Lavrov.

SECRETARY POMPEO: Yes.

QUESTION: And obviously, you're going to talk about Venezuela. What's your plan? What's your plan to solve the situation in Venezuela, and what's your main message to Minister Lavrov?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Yeah. So the plan in Venezuela is really straightforward. We want the Venezuelan people to have an opportunity for democracy, free and fair elections. That can't be done with Maduro in power. The Venezuelan people know that. Fifty-four nations have signed up for that as well. They understand too that Juan Guaido is the duly elected leader there in Venezuela.

And so our mission set is to support the Venezuelan people in every way we can, work with our partners in the region, and get the outcome that the Venezuelan people demand. You have starving children. You have children that can't get medicine. And you have food and medicine sitting on the border, and Maduro won't let it in.

And so any country that's involved in Venezuela, whether that's Cuba or China or the Iranians, needs to get out of the way, needs to cease that activity, needs to allow the Venezuelan people to begin to rebuild and reconstruct their country. This is an imperative, and the United States is prepared to continue to support that. And I'll share that with Foreign Minister Lavrov or anyone else who asks.

QUESTION: Yes. But Venezuela has put a strain on your relationship with Russia and there is also Ukraine. That's still unsolved. What's your plan to deal with these tensions? It's something that we're always interested in Finland for historical reasons the tensions between Russia and Western powers like yourself.

SECRETARY POMPEO: Sure, yes. You forgot the larger tension of the large nuclear arsenal aimed directly at Europe, right? So the tension is certainly felt by countries here. We're further away.

Look, our mission set is to try and find paths forward. What I'm hoping to do today is to continue my efforts. I met with Foreign Minister Lavrov before. I met with my counterparts when I was at CIA to find places where we have overlapping interests where we can make progress together. That's what I hope we can achieve. It may be that we can't do that. We'll see.

QUESTION: Okay. START Treaty, the New START, you've had some reservations. President Trump has voiced his reservations about the treaty, but I think they had a constructive discussion with President Putin. When it comes to START Treaty, how has your thinking evolved, and how do you see the path going forward in renewing that treaty?

SECRETARY POMPEO: That's a good question. The conversation that President Trump had with President Putin was a good one. I think it provides a basis for us to begin to build out teams to move forward. President Trump is deeply aware that you need two partners who are prepared to comply with a treaty, so we need to make sure that unlike the INF, that we have a incentive system that will cause countries to actually comply.

President Trump also knows that we now have a third entrant. These treaties were decades past, when China was in a different place. It now presents a geostrategic threat as well. And so President Trump would very much like China to be part of any agreement that's reached, and so we'll endeavor to do that.

QUESTION: Yeah. I was going to ask you about the multilateral arms control agreement, but do you think that's realistic in any time near future, or should you just focus on first getting the bilateral treaty renewed?

SECRETARY POMPEO: I hope we can begin to have a conversation about the broader opportunity. It may be that that is too ambitious in the short term. There's just a couple years left before New START expires. It may be that we have to do that on a bilateral basis, but I would hope that we would be well along in our discussions to see if there isn't a way we could do this with all three countries. That's what the world would benefit most from, and so it's the outcome we're going to drive towards.

QUESTION: Okay. You're one of the few key members or few key people who've been with President Trump the whole term. What's your secret in having such a good working relationship with President Trump? Does it have to do with personality or policy?

SECRETARY POMPEO: No secret: Work hard, deliver value; be candid, straightforward, honest; and then when you're given guidance and direction, go execute it with all the energy you can possibly muster.

QUESTION: And what are your personal goals for the remainder of your term? What do you hope to achieve? You've got at least a year left unless something comes up.

SECRETARY POMPEO: Yes, unless something happens – yes, of course. Look, I want to continue to build out the State Department. It's taken a little while to get our team on the field. I want to make sure that we've got the team fully engaged. We're working on some training issues inside the State Department as well.

As for the goals around the world, you can see the missions we're working on. We continue to believe there is an opportunity in North Korea to denuclearize in a way that is fully verified. We want to resolve the situation in Venezuela. We are convinced that we have improved Middle East stability as a result of our policies with respect to the Islamic Republic of Iran. I'm not sure – there's a whole handful. I'm not sure we have time for the whole list.

QUESTION: Okay. One more thing I'd like to go back to if we have time for one final question is you have your hands full both with Russia and China, as we heard from the speech, and there are so many things going on. There's obviously the trade war and the situation of Taiwan and them. What's the main difference when it comes to solving these tensions between these two powers, Russia and China? How do you view them? What do you – how do they differ strategically, and how do you look at those two different tensions?

SECRETARY POMPEO: So that's a fair question, but they're very different. Russia is a historical power, one with which the world has engaged in conflict now twice over the last century. Russia is also now the 15th largest economy in the world, so an economy that is not growing in the same way.

China has 1.5 billion people. They have a million ethnic minorities that they've put into re-education camps. That is a humanitarian crisis of epic proportions. We haven't seen things like that since the 1930s. But it's a growing country in which we are deeply engaged economically. We have huge economic relationships between businesses in our two countries. So the problem set is different, but the expectation is the same.

All we want from each of those two countries is for them to participate in free and open economies, compete using the rule of law, not use their military power to close off places like the South China Sea. Those are the kind of things we ask from them. They're the things we ask Finland to do. And in that sense, they present an identical challenge.

QUESTION: Thank you. Thank you very much, Mr. Secretary.

SECRETARY POMPEO: Thank you for your time.

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