

Press Releases: Interview With Yonit Levi of Channel 12

Interview
Michael R. Pompeo

Secretary of State

David Citadel Hotel, Jerusalem
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QUESTION: Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, thank you so much for finding the time to talk to us in this whirlwind of a tour of yours, sir.

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

QUESTION: This is an important visit to Kuwait, to Israel, and to Lebanon. Here in Israel, however, sir, we're in the final stages of a very intense election race, and Netanyahu's detractors are saying that the Trump administration is doing all in its power – and undoubtedly, it has power – to ensure that Netanyahu gets re-elected. How do you respond to that?

SECRETARY POMPEO: So my trip and, frankly, the prime minister's visit to Washington next week, are about really – real pressing issues, things that matter to the world. They are time-sensitive, whether it's the challenges that are presented by the Islamic Republic of Iran or the issues in Syria. These are issues that can't wait, and they don't work on election clocks. Our mission is to work the power of the United States and Israel together against these common threats, and it's why I'm here today and I know it's what the President and prime minister will talk about next week as well.

QUESTION: President Trump said in Hanoi three weeks ago that Netanyahu was a strong leader, and then you said he'll be accepted in Washington with all the pomp and circumstance that he – that will happen next week. You're here with all the images that generates. This does add some inordinate amount of political cache for Netanyahu at a critical time obviously here.

SECRETARY POMPEO: Qasem Soleimani doesn't care about your election. Qasem Soleimani is continuing to press the case. Hizballah's continuing to press its case. Each and every day, the Islamic Republic of Iran is continuing to – its efforts to wipe Israel off the face of the planet. There's no time like the present to make sure and address this issue. It's why I'm here today. It's why I'll be in Lebanon tomorrow and the next day to talk about these issues that are truly of the moment.

QUESTION: Can you ensure the Israeli public that the warm relationship between the American leadership and the Israeli leadership will continue even if Netanyahu loses on April 9th?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Oh, I fully expect that's the case. The history of the relationship between our two countries is deep. It is strong. It survives presidents and prime ministers. It is truly between the two nations where its peoples have shared common value sets, two democracies, two nations that care deeply about the well-being of their people, and two nations that share a set of common threats as well.

QUESTION: It is obviously a common practice upon diplomatic visits to a democratic ally to also meet leaders of the opposition. Have you met, spoken with Benny Gantz or any other leaders of the opposition?

SECRETARY POMPEO: I haven't on this trip, but Mr. Gantz has met with other American leaders. The Israeli people will speak in a handful of days. They'll make their decision, and America and Israel will move forward together.

QUESTION: So let's move from the political quagmire in Israel to a very simple task of bringing peace to the Middle East. And every – the architects of the deal, it's coined "the deal of the century," whether if it's Kushner or Ambassador Friedman or Greenblatt, are keeping the cards quite close to the chest. It's very frustrating for us journalists. But can I ask you to divulge anything about the plan? President Trump said famously, I'm happy if it's one state, I'm happy if it's two state, if the parties themselves are happy with it. Can you tell us if the term "two-state solution" will appear in the final plan?

SECRETARY POMPEO: So I can't share much about it. We're still working our way through it. In due course, we'll present the plan. The whole world will get a chance to see the vision that we have for how we might bring peace to solve this intractable problem.

QUESTION: Due course is weeks, months? When should we expect it?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Well, soon. I appreciate you asking, but soon enough, when the time is most appropriate. Remember the mission set. We want a better life for the Palestinian people. I know the Israeli people want that, too. We want peace between the Palestinians and the Israelis. These are commonly held objectives. A broadly shared vision for how to achieve it is something that we're hoping that the ideas that we'll be bringing forth will achieve.

QUESTION: But is it – obviously, if you say something like autonomy, which is what Ambassador Friedman said to *The Washington Examiner*, Palestinians, for them, it's a nonstarter. They're not going to be in the table, they're not even going to be in the same universe, if that's what the plan is going to say.

SECRETARY POMPEO: Well, I'm hopeful. I've seen the plan. I have a pretty good understanding of its details, although there are a handful still to be worked out. I'm very hopeful that all nations – the Israelis, the Palestinian

people, the Arab states, European countries, people from all around the world – will stare at this plan and say this has got merit, this has legs, this is a reason that we can begin to build and move forward. I expect that that will be the case.

We hope that when we present it, everyone will take this seriously, they'll give it good thought. There may be things they don't like, there may be things they love about the ideas that we put forth, but they'll use it as a platform that we can build on to achieve what, frankly, administrations before us have tried to help achieve but have been unsuccessful.

QUESTION: But again, is this going to be in that vision of the historic U.S. policy of two states, or it's going to be something completely different?

SECRETARY POMPEO: We'll just have to wait and see.

QUESTION: (Laughter.) You're good at building the tension on this, sir. Is it true that the United States had to wait until after the election to publish it, to not – to foil Netanyahu's situation here?

SECRETARY POMPEO: No, look, we've been waiting for the right time until we had the plan fully developed, that we'd had input from lots of different people with lots of different thoughts about how to achieve the right outcome. So it's taken some time for us to get ready, and when the moment is right we'll share that vision.

QUESTION: You mentioned the Iranian threat, and obviously it's been – Israel has hailed the President Trump's decision to basically withdraw from the nuclear agreement with Iran. What is the endgame, sir? Is the endgame to put pressure on Iran and to get a better deal? Or would the endgame, in your opinion, be regime change or anything of that sort?

SECRETARY POMPEO: So the way we think about this is in a broader context, right. The objective is stability in the Middle East and peace and less violence in the Middle East and fewer times where there are crises here in the Middle East. That's the objective.

Today, the primary mover for malign influence in the Middle East is the Islamic Republic of Iran, whether that's the assassination campaign in Europe, the funding of the Houthis, the money that goes to Hamas and Hizballah, the support for the PMCs in Iraq, the malfeasance in Syria. The list of Iranian aggression and threats to the world is long. What we're asking Iran to do is simply stop those things, to behave like a normal nation, like we ask every other country to behave. If they do those things, we'll all move forward together.

As for the JCPOA, look, it was a disastrous deal. It guaranteed that Iran would have a path to a nuclear weapon. It was unacceptable. It was unacceptable for America, it was unacceptable for Israel, in our judgment an unacceptable risk to the world. So we withdrew from that. Today, we're engaged in a pressure campaign to convince the Iranian regime to stay away from the nuclear weapons program, to stay away from developing that nuclear

capability, and to engage in the world in a way that normal nations do.

QUESTION: By the way, you were CIA director. Do you see any sort of work by Iranians to relentlessly break into Israeli officials' phones? Do you know of any of that kind of attempt?

SECRETARY POMPEO: So I don't want to talk about specifics, but suffice it to say we've made clear that the Iranian efforts – their cyber campaigns, their efforts to break into technology all across the world – are real. They are sophisticated and require attention from the best counter-cyber teams in the world, among those the United States and Israel.

QUESTION: Are you planning on changing or saying that the U.S. will recognize Israeli sovereignty in the Golan Heights?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Yeah, I don't have anything to add for you today.

QUESTION: Sir, my final question, if that's okay. You jokingly said that the President might one day end your job with a tweet. You're very close to the President. I wonder if what we're seeing is sort of the era of diplomacy on Twitter or decision making on Twitter or governance on Twitter, actually.

SECRETARY POMPEO: No, I was just talking about something that cabinet officials say all the time. They serve at the pleasure of the President. At any moment the President decides that he doesn't want us to do that anymore, we will graciously move on with our lives. We serve at his pleasure. That was my point that I said in a kidding fashion.

No, I don't think we're seeing diplomacy by Twitter. It still requires thoughtfulness, it requires resources, it requires capability and determination. But the ability to communicate, the ability to rapidly spread messages around the world through social media, including Twitter, is absolutely important. It allows leaders around the world to share their views instantaneously with millions of people, something that was more difficult before. And that's our real power; it's another element to the capacity to shape the world.

QUESTION: Yeah, and obviously there's the importance of personal conversation. Secretary Mike Pompeo, again, thank you so much for talking with us.

SECRETARY POMPEO: Thank you very much.

QUESTION: Thank you.

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