

# Press Releases: Secretary of State Michael R. Pompeo With Scott Thuman of Sinclair Broadcast Group

Interview  
Michael R. Pompeo

Secretary of State

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**QUESTION:** Mr. Secretary, thank you for the time.

**SECRETARY POMPEO:** You bet. It's great to be with you.

**QUESTION:** This week, four Americans were killed in Syria. ISIS has claimed responsibility, yet when the President announced that there was going to be a withdrawal, he said we have won against ISIS. In light of what we just saw, how do we declare that?

**SECRETARY POMPEO:** The loss of American life is always tragic. The loss of these four, this is certainly the case. This administration has done more to take down the caliphate in Syria than had been done in previous years. We're proud of that. But we understand deeply that this threat, this ideological threat from radical Islamic extremism, of which ISIS is a component – we have al-Qaida and there are many groups; al-Shabaab, we saw a terror attack this week – these threats are real and the United States continues to put enormous pressure all across the globe to defeat this threat from radical Islamic terrorism. We are serious about it. We're serious about it in Syria. We have forces throughout the region that will continue to attack ISIS in Syria proper, but in western Iraq as well, as is appropriate. All across the globe, this administration is determined to take down this threat from terrorism.

**QUESTION:** Does the death of those four Americans reinforce the need to pull U.S. forces out or do you worry that creates a vacuum? Would we essentially be declaring victory and walking away too soon?

**SECRETARY POMPEO:** So the change the President made there is tactical, right. We're going to get our 2,000 uniformed military personnel out of the region. We still have enormous reach there. We have the capability to do this. And most importantly, we have the direction from the commander, President Trump, to continue this fight. And even as we sit here today, even as we're sitting

in this room, the campaign in Syria against ISIS continues.

**QUESTION:** By far the largest effort to stop terror has been in the Middle East. You just returned from a trip there to ensure our partners that we are fully engaged. Now critics would argue that by getting forces out of Syria, getting them out of Afghanistan, that we're less engaged, less involved. How do you respond to that?

**SECRETARY POMPEO:** Yeah, remember, we're fighting these terror threats all across the world. We're fighting them here in the United States. We do work to defeat them in Asia and in Africa. In every case, we try to make sure we have all of the tools of American power – and importantly, you mentioned my trip – and our allies in the world working alongside us in a coordinated way to share intelligence, to provide the right tools, whether they are diplomatic tools, military tools, counterterrorism tools. Each of those elements of power to defeat these threats are fully engaged. And so a tactical change in one place or another, adding a few soldiers, taking some soldiers down, these are tactical changes. They don't change the mission set, and frankly, I'm convinced we will continue to have the successes we've already had in the first two years of this administration.

**QUESTION:** Are we winning the war on terror?

**SECRETARY POMPEO:** This is a long struggle. I'm confident we'll be at it for a while. We've made real progress. We've had success at reducing the risk here in the homeland, and one always wants to be cautious, but we've had some success there. These are important things that the American people need to understand. This threat continues, but this president is determined to reduce the risk to the American people from terrorism wherever we fight it, whether it is Sunni terrorism, Shia terrorism that's taking place from Tehran – each of these threats is something that this administration will continue to put the full force of the American power behind reducing.

**QUESTION:** Regarding Iran, you've talked about their "five-capital strategy," about the spread of their forces across the region backing terror, and you've said that people should, quote, "take control of their capital." Does there have to be regime change in Tehran?

**SECRETARY POMPEO:** No. What there needs to be is behavior that is like a normal country. The religious revolution there is out actively engaged in suicide campaigns in – assassination campaigns, rather, in Europe. They are conducting terror campaigns throughout the region, whether they're supporting the Shia militias in Iraq, or the Houthi forces in Yemen, or Hizballah in Lebanon and Syria. These are real threats, and what we're demanding from the Islamic Republic of Iran is very simple: Don't build nuclear weapons, don't continue your nuclear program, cease the terror campaigns, stop assassination efforts, behave like a normal country, and then you can live in your country in the way that the people of Iran, the people of Iran who are smart and capable and want something different from this, will get us all to the right place.

**QUESTION:** How critical is it that the Arab nations band together and create

essentially an Arab NATO so that the U.S. could hand over some of the more costly, dangerous responsibilities there?

**SECRETARY POMPEO:** So we've already made real progress with that. We have Arab partners throughout the region doing a lot of work alongside of us. And in many cases, as you've seen our efforts in Syria, doing some of the hardest, most difficult tasks in the region. I travelled to Egypt where the Egyptians are doing great counterterrorism work. We all need to do more. I was in Bahrain where they've done really good work as well. In each of these places, these countries are already working on these problem sets to support our joint effort to take down the threat from extremism and terrorism. I want to make sure we're doing this in a coordinated way, so to the extent we can get all of the Gulf states, all of those countries in that region together working on the same issue, we'll be more successful.

**QUESTION:** Are we getting out of the Middle East?

**SECRETARY POMPEO:** Absolutely not. We're a force for good. The notion of get out doesn't frankly – doesn't capture what it is the Trump administration is intending to do. This is about protecting Americans, and we will do the things we need to do to protect America.

**QUESTION:** The controversy continues around the murder of journalist Jamal Khashoggi. It's not going away. Is the relationship with Saudi Arabia so important that even if the crown prince had some involvement, he wouldn't face punishment for that?

**SECRETARY POMPEO:** We've said everyone who needs to be held accountable will be. Period. Full stop.

**QUESTION:** Are you satisfied with what you've seen so far on that action?

**SECRETARY POMPEO:** The United States continues to develop the facts set to make sure we understand precisely what happened, who all was involved. We recognize this murder was unacceptable. We've already held a number of actors accountable and will continue to do so. It's important to note, we can do two things at once here in the United States. It's not – sometimes people suggest that you either have to spend all of your energy trying to hold the murderers of Jamal Khashoggi accountable or you can have an important partnership with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. It is entirely possible; indeed, we are accomplishing both. This is an important relationship. It's important for Saudi Arabia, it's important for the United States, and we're going to continue to make sure we do the things to protect the American people by making sure that relationship is strong.

**QUESTION:** On North Korea, there's plenty of reporting about a delegation here in Washington this weekend planning for a possible second summit. Critics say since that first meeting that North Korea has yet to truly denuclearize as far as giving up weapons, long-range missiles. Some people wonder what is the point of having these conversations anymore. Is there a reason to be optimistic?

**SECRETARY POMPEO:** Yeah. "Critics say" is how you began this question, as I recall. Some critics have said we've offered too much. Many critics have said we haven't offered enough. I don't have much to add other than the President has made enormous strides in working with North Korea to get their commitment to denuclearize. We now need to execute. We need to implement. We've always known this would be a long process. While we do that we need to make sure we reduce risk, and we've done that. There aren't nuclear tests being conducted. There haven't been missile tests conducted. These are things that were threatening the United States when President Trump took office. We want to reduce that risk, reduce North Korea's capacity to build out their program. These discussions are an important component for making sure that we do everything we can to deliver on the commitments that were made in Singapore between Chairman Kim and President Trump.

**QUESTION:** Five past presidents have tried the same thing. Is there reason to believe that this time is different?

**SECRETARY POMPEO:** Yeah. It's the first time a North Korean leader has met with a United States president, looked him in the eye and said I'll do it.

**QUESTION:** Regarding NATO, we're about to mark 70 years, 70th anniversary there. I'm sorry, on NATO, we're soon marking our 70 years of partnership, but President Trump has talked about the U.S. quote going its "own way." Is the U.S. discussing leaving the group? Would you support that?

**SECRETARY POMPEO:** So I'll get a chance in just a couple months now to host a big meeting here in Washington, D.C., all of the members of NATO celebrating this 70th anniversary. President Trump's been very clear: he fully supports the mission that we're engaged in with respect to NATO. He wants our partners to respect that commitment as well. He wants them to live up not – frankly, not to commitments that the United States made, but to commitments that each of those countries made. It was those countries that themselves in Wales, years ago now, said we'll get up to a certain level of spending. We need them to do that, and President Trump has spent two years working on that. We've had success. I forget the number now, but we're to \$50 or \$60 billion more spending by our NATO allies. This is all for the good. This is all for the NATO mission. This is a central part of President Trump's efforts to build coalitions, to grab allies, and to make sure that we are working together for our common objectives. In that sense, we're fully supportive of making sure that NATO can execute its mission, and we're counting on our European partners to do their part to assist in it.

**QUESTION:** Last thing. This administration has seen numerous cabinet changes over the last couple of months. We're all well aware the President's relationships can sour at times. In one word, how would you describe your relationship with the President?

**SECRETARY POMPEO:** Oh, I can't answer in one word. I work for the President. I work at his pleasure. I every day strive to achieve the mission, the commander's intent that he lays out for me and for the State Department so that we can bring diplomacy to the right places, and frankly, to achieve those outcomes that the American people so richly deserve. So it's a great

relationship in the sense of I think we have a good understanding of what it is we're trying to do, and I work hard at it every day.

**QUESTION:** Mr. Secretary, thank you for your time.

**SECRETARY POMPEO:** Thank you, sir.

**QUESTION:** Appreciate it.

**SECRETARY POMPEO:** Good to see you.

**QUESTION:** Thank you.

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