

Press Releases: Interview With Alain Dargham of MTV

Interview
Michael R. Pompeo

Secretary of State

U.S. Embassy
Beirut, Lebanon
March 23, 2019

QUESTION: Mr. Secretary, Mike Pompeo, thank you so much for your time and good to see you.

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

QUESTION: Thank you. Let's start with your tough speech yesterday. You mentioned the Lebanese people should be brave and stand up against Hizballah. What can they do to face this strong group? Is Washington willing to go further steps to help if they do so?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Yes, the good news is that my meetings here have shown that the Lebanese people are prepared to do this. They are prepared and they understand that their sovereignty and their independence depends on their own efforts.

I love this place. I love Lebanon. It is a special place in the Middle East. It is a democracy with enormous religious diversity, and that's why allowing Hizballah – funded by the Islamic Republic of Iran – is so dangerous. It's the threat that is posed to all those people, Christians and Muslims, people from a broad range of understandings and experiences to – people from the north, people from the Bekaa, all across Lebanon. We must all get this right. The United States is prepared to support that effort. We want our good partners in Lebanon to understand that we're with them in this battle and that they don't have to allow the Islamic Republic of Iran to underwrite a terrorist organization that infiltrates inside of their country.

QUESTION: Last night you gave a speech that's considered to be the pointed speech probably since you took office as Secretary of State. What led up to that?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Oh, I don't know about that. What President Trump and our administration tries to do is speak the truth, to call out facts, to engage

in a very realistic diplomatic effort to achieve the outcomes that we know every nation wants. This trip started in Kuwait and then traveled to Israel and came here. I was in the Middle East before that. I think I was in six or seven countries. Each one of those – each one of those nations wants America to help. They understand that we are a force for good in the region, and they want that help to assist them in stronger government, stronger institutions, and more capable resources to help their own people, and America is prepared to do that in each and every case.

QUESTION: You also said in your speech last night that Washington would continue to use all peaceful means possible to pressure Hizballah. Is Washington considering to expand sanctions to include Lebanese political figures close to Hizballah?

SECRETARY POMPEO: I never get ahead of the President with respect to who or what entities we might designate or which tools we might use, but I want the Lebanese people to understand that we're prepared to use all peaceful tools that the United States has in conjunction with and we'll work alongside our Lebanese partners to ensure that we get the right outcomes. If that involves sanctioning particular individuals, we're prepared to do that. If it means more American diplomatic engagement, we're prepared to do that as well. We want allies and partners in the region to be part of this too. It's a campaign in helping the Lebanese people have this one – this wonderful, diverse, great democracy that is so vital for peace and stability throughout the entire Middle East.

QUESTION: You're not worried that more sanctions could lead to hurting the Lebanese economy?

SECRETARY POMPEO: We don't want that. Indeed, we want just the opposite. I was with a group of folks yesterday talking about the Lebanese economy and how more American businesses might invest, how we might help the Lebanese economy grow. We certainly want that. We think a healthy, thriving Lebanese economy is good for the very peace and stability that I've been speaking about here this morning.

QUESTION: After your meetings with Aoun and Berri and Bassil on one side and Hariri and Hassan and Jumblatt and Geagea on the other side, have you sensed a unified opinion among them about Hizballah?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Yes, I have. I think they all understand the importance of keeping the political power out of the hands of the Islamic Republic of Iran. It's been a consistent theme, something each leader I've spoken with has talked about.

QUESTION: See, some sources was mentioning that you were not happy after your meeting with Bassil. What happened exactly?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Oh, I don't know who those folks are. We had a fine meeting. We had a conversation like all of my conversations yesterday that were very frank, that were very candid. That's what friends do: they talk about how to move forward, how to work together. Where there are differences,

you try to resolve them – you make sure others understand your point of view. Every one of my counterparts yesterday did that. No, I thought each of the meetings I had yesterday was constructive and productive.

QUESTION: Let's talk about Syrian refugees. Some – you always mention you want a safe return for displaced Syrian refugees to their home, but might – the peaceful solution might take years and the Lebanese economy (inaudible) as well. Would you encourage a dialogue between the Lebanese president and Bashar Assad on this matter?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Well, I'll stay out of that. That's a decision for the Lebanese leadership to make. I will say this: I visited – it's been a little while ago – I had a chance to visit some of these refugees in the Bekaa Valley. I watched the graciousness, the nobleness of how Lebanon is treating these refugees. They were running after-school sessions, helping to educate the young people who have come here, displaced persons who were in a really bad place. Lebanon should be incredibly proud of what it has done to take care of these refugees. The United States appreciates the burden this has put on the Lebanese economy, and our mission in Syria is to get a political resolution such that the safe and voluntary return of these people can take place just as soon as possible.

QUESTION: It was a pleasure talking with you, Mr. Secretary.

SECRETARY POMPEO: Thank you.

QUESTION: Thank you so much.

SECRETARY POMPEO: Thank you. Great to see you.

QUESTION: Yes, thank you.

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[Press Releases: Interview With Hiba Nasr of Sky News](#)

Interview
Michael R. Pompeo

Secretary of State

U.S. Embassy
Beirut, Lebanon
March 23, 2019

QUESTION: Mr. Secretary, thanks for sitting down with us.

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

QUESTION: I will start with Lebanon, your last stop on this trip. Yesterday you made a strong statement and you said that Lebanon and the Lebanese people have a choice: move forward toward an independent nation or give up with Iran ambitions. Was this a warning? And what you are asking for, what you are asking the Lebanese people to do?

SECRETARY POMPEO: So Lebanon is a great nation with a proud history. One of the things that I love about this place is its enormous religious diversity, people of all stripes. It's a beacon of democracy throughout the world. My message yesterday was that that's at risk. It's at risk because the Ayatollah Khamenei and Qasem Soleimani and the Islamic Republic of Iran want to take over this country; they want to control this state; they want access to the Mediterranean; they want power and influence here. And the people of Lebanon deserve better than that, they want something different from that, and America is prepared to help. I think the world is prepared to help.

And so my trip here was to talk to leaders from every group and every religion to share with them that America is prepared to help continue to achieve the great, diverse, wonderful, rambunctious place that Lebanon is, and that they should know they need not succumb to the efforts of Hizballah and Iran and Hassan Nasrallah.

QUESTION: But it was pretty clear that the Lebanese prime minister and even the president, Lebanese president, weren't on the same page with you.

SECRETARY POMPEO: Yeah, I don't think that's true. I think that's false.

QUESTION: But we already – we already listened to America (inaudible).

SECRETARY POMPEO: It's just false. You're just wrong.

QUESTION: So I am mixed up?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Yeah, but you're just wrong. That's okay. You're very talented. I spoke with him too. They understand – President Aoun, the foreign minister – they both understand the need for Lebanese freedom, democracy, independence, sovereignty. They want those things for their people too. They

live here. Indeed, each of them told me that. They said, "Mr. Secretary, we want that more than you do because we live here." They are just as determined as I am, and I appreciate that, I welcome that. I'm glad that they are working towards the same ends that America hopes for the Lebanese people.

QUESTION: On the Golan Heights.

SECRETARY POMPEO: Yes.

QUESTION: You imposed sanctions on Russia for annexing Crimea. Now you are going to recognize the sovereign – the Israeli sovereignty over these territories. Isn't this a double-standard policy?

SECRETARY POMPEO: No, not at all.

QUESTION: How?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Not at all. What the President did with the Golan Heights is recognize the reality on the ground and the security situation necessary for the protection of the Israeli state. It's that – it's that simple.

QUESTION: But isn't this a violation for the Security Council resolutions?

SECRETARY POMPEO: No, this is – this is deeply consistent with the reality on the ground, the facts on the ground. What we want for the whole Middle East or at least from my entire trip, which began in Kuwait and then moved to Israel and now here, is to work on Middle East stability. America is a force for good in the region. Our intentions are noble. We want good outcomes for the people of Lebanon, for the people of Kuwait, for the people of Israel, for all nations in the Middle East, and the decision the President made will increase the opportunity for there to be stability throughout the region.

QUESTION: On Syria also, ISIS now is almost finished –

SECRETARY POMPEO: Yes.

QUESTION: – as we know.

SECRETARY POMPEO: The caliphate. There's still work to do defeating radical Islamic terrorism.

QUESTION: But the U.S. policy regarding Syria is still confusing. Some of your allies is asking what you are – where you are now regarding the force that you are trying to form with your (inaudible) and what about the mission? Is it a conditions-based mission or you look for a specific outcome?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Our allies aren't confused. We've been working closely with our allies and partners throughout the region – the Gulf states, European countries, a broad coalition. We brought together over 80 nations that has led to the destruction of the caliphate. You remember they were cutting off heads and they were burning people in cages. We took down the real estate that they held. The threat's not gone. The work continues. And America's mission remains unchanged: we are determined to keep America safe from the

threat from radical Islamic terrorism. What we'll do from time to time about how many soldiers we have in a particular place, the tactics we'll use to confront this terrorism, they will change as the situation changes. That is, we will look to the conditions on the ground and the conditions in the region. We will work to develop a comprehensive plan to reduce the threat of radical Islamic terrorism. That's our mission. It's what President Trump has asked us to do, and our decisions in Syria are entirely consistent with that.

We have – we have lots of efforts ongoing all across the Middle East to ensure that those countries too have an opportunity to defeat terrorism in their own country as well. We have great partners in the region that we work well alongside and we've done good work together.

QUESTION: The Europeans will participate with the force that you are forming on Syria?

SECRETARY POMPEO: So we'll see precisely how this all moves forward, but what I know is this and what your viewers ought to know is this: America is working diligently to help each nation have its own sovereignty, its own independence, so that it can be successful. Political resolutions should be the norm, not the exception – not violence, but political resolutions – and that's our mission set, whether that be in Iraq, whether that be in Syria, whether that be in Yemen. That's what America is trying to achieve and we're working with our friends and allies around the region to get to the right place.

QUESTION: To what extent confronting Iran in Syria is part of this mission?

SECRETARY POMPEO: That's everywhere. Everywhere. Everywhere we find malign activity by the Islamic government of – Republic of Iran, the United States is going to pursue it, whether that's in South America, whether that's in the Middle East. Wherever we find it, we are going to give it a push back. What we're asking (inaudible) is the same, and you've heard me talk about this. We want good things for the Iranian people. We want the Iranian people not to have their brothers and sisters coming back in body bags and in caskets. We want the Iranian people to have the democracy and the freedom and the liberty and the human rights protections that we want for everyone in the world. We want good things for the Iranian people, and their leadership has betrayed them. They have destroyed a once-proud nation and an economy that is now a wreck – not because of anything the world did but because of an enormous mismanagement of the theocracy. They're running a revolutionary effort around the Middle East, creating havoc here in Lebanon and all around the Middle East.

Our efforts will be everywhere. Our efforts will be intense. Our objective is noble: to help the Iranian people successfully retake the leadership and the governance of their own nation in the way I know they so richly deserve.

QUESTION: On Yemen, you are expressing now a concern over Houthis' behavior and you already warned yourself, Mr. Secretary, that the country will be a puppet state for Iran. So how do you follow up on this and are you going to impose sanctions, for example, against the Houthis and for designating some

of their leaders under terrorism, for example?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Yeah, it's a good question, and now we're getting (inaudible) announcements on who we may sanction or who we may choose not to sanction, but your point is well taken. Today, Iran is firing missiles. They're using the Houthis as a proxy force, but Iran is firing missiles into Saudi Arabia, endangering not only the lives of the Saudi people but all of those who transit – Lebanese businesspeople who go to Saudi Arabia, Americans and Europeans who are doing visits in Riyadh are under the threat from the ayatollah and from Qasem Soleimani. This is unacceptable and we're going to use every tool that we can to achieve the outcome that, frankly, the people in Yemen want and the people of the region are going to continue to demand.

QUESTION: And speaking of Iran, General Votel last month in the Congress said that you are planning a strategy to approach all of Iran's behavior: missiles, drones, proxies, all these. Could you please elaborate on this?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Yes, that's certainly right. I have now – goodness, back in May of last year – laid out our expectations for the Islamic Republic of Iran. It has to do with their nuclear program – they can't have one. This has to do with their missile program. It has to do with their terrorist activity around the world. What we're asking, though, is really simple with respect to each of those: become a normal nation. We're asking of the Islamic Republic of Iran nothing more than we ask of every country in the world: don't conduct assassination campaigns in Europe; don't fire missiles into major international airports; don't engage in the human rights behavior where they detain American citizens and citizens from all around the world, political – taking prisoners for political purposes. This is something the Lebanese people know well. These risks are enormous. Hizballah and Iran present an enormous threat to the people in the region, and we're going to use the tools we have available to achieve outcomes that I know every nation, every leader as I travel the Middle East, is supportive of what it is we're trying to achieve.

QUESTION: One more question, Mr. Secretary, about the peace plan. I know Iran is on the top of the priorities in this mission, but you were asked about the peace plan and you said that you want a good life for Palestinians. But you don't think, Mr. Secretary, that that good life has to be chosen by the people themselves? Are you sharing your ideas with the Palestinians?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Oh, yes. No, the people will have to do this for themselves. That's absolutely certain. President Trump's made that very clear that the – in the end, the American vision and the American proposal will have to be decided upon by Israel and the Palestinians. They will have to make these decisions for themselves. Our mission is to try to show them what that might look like. What might it look like? You know the conditions of the people in Gaza who are under the thumb of Hamas. I don't think that's how the Palestinians living in Gaza want their lives to be. We want to show them a path – a path forward – which will make their lives better and the lives of their children and their grandchildren. That's the American vision.

QUESTION: Thanks, Mr. Secretary.

SECRETARY POMPEO: Thank you very much.

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[Press Releases: Consultations With the European Union on the Afghan Peace Process](#)

Media Note
Office of the Spokesperson

Washington, DC
March 22, 2019

U.S. Special Representative for Afghanistan Reconciliation Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad and EU Special Envoy for Afghanistan Ambassador Roland Kobia met in Washington, D.C., for consultations on the Afghan peace process, on March 21-22, 2019. They agreed that bringing an end to Afghanistan's war and achieving peace must be the key objective, and that violence should cease. To benefit all Afghans, the region, and the world, they further underscored that any peace agreement should uphold the rights of all Afghans, in particular those of women, minorities, and children, and ensure Afghan soil is not used by international terrorist groups or individuals against any country. Both sides underscored their respect for the sovereignty, independence, and territorial integrity of Afghanistan.

The United States and the European Union will continue their close coordination. They encourage all countries to support the current peace process, inclusive intra-Afghan talks, and lasting development and reconstruction in Afghanistan.

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Press Releases: Consultations With China and Russia on the Afghan Peace Process

Media Note
Office of the Spokesperson

Washington, DC
March 22, 2019

Representatives of the United States, China, and Russia met in Washington, D.C., March 21-22, 2019. The parties exchanged views on the current status of the Afghan peace process and discussed common efforts to bring peace, prosperity, and security to Afghanistan. They underscored their respect for the sovereignty, independence, and territorial integrity of Afghanistan, as well as Afghanistan's right to make its own political, security, and economic decisions.

The United States, China, and Russia agreed to continue further discussions. The exact date and venue for the next meeting will be decided through diplomatic channels. The parties will continue to seek common efforts and coordination on the Afghan peace process.

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Press Releases: Guyanese Elections

Press Statement
Robert Palladino

Deputy Spokesperson

Washington, DC
March 22, 2019

The United States reiterates the importance of scheduling genuinely free and fair national elections in the Co-Operative Republic of Guyana in adherence with the Guyanese constitution and Guyanese law. The U.S. government values Guyana as a friend and partner and stands ready to assist as needed.

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