

THE ECONOMIC CLUB

O F W A S H I N G T O N, D. C.

U.S. Secretary of State Michael Pompeo discusses foreign policy and American diplomacy throughout the world.

**The Honorable Michael R. Pompeo
Secretary
U.S. Department of State
Monday, July 29, 2019**

DAVID M. RUBENSTEIN: Mr. Secretary, thank you very, very much for coming. I know you had nothing else to do today, so – [laughter] –

SECRETARY MICHAEL R. POMPEO: It's been a busy Monday already. Thanks for having me here, I really appreciate it.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Did something happen this morning I don't know about, or?

SEC. POMPEO: No. All is well. I'm here. [Laughter.]

MR. RUBENSTEIN: OK. You became our 70th United States Secretary of State in April of 2018. You're happy with the job? Is it as much fun as you thought it was going to be? [Laughter.]

SEC. POMPEO: Every day. [Laughter.]

MR. RUBENSTEIN: So, what are the most significant foreign policy issues of concern to you? What do you think are the biggest challenges we have in our country right now, in the foreign policy area?

SEC. POMPEO: So, you know, I get asked this question about sort of rank-ordering the challenges –

MR. RUBENSTEIN: You mean that's not an original question? [Laughter.]

SEC. POMPEO: I mean – so, look, it's an important question. It's about priorities, and resources, and how do you allocate time, and how do you think about the problem set. You know, for me, the first – the first task when I came in now 16-17 months ago, to the State Department, after having been the CIA director, was to make sure State Department was ready in a moment of crisis. So, I spent a lot of time making sure that my team was prepared for the day that every CEO tries to deal with too, right, what happens when something really bad happens that was unexpected, and is your team capable? Do you have the resources and people that can respond in the moment for something that, frankly, you hadn't given enough thought about?

In terms of priorities, you know, every morning the first thing I do is read about China. So, I take time and talk about all the broad array of issues that present both real opportunity for the United States and risk to America from China.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Well, let's talk about China for a moment. The trade negotiations are going on. You're not the lead in the trade negotiations. I think Bob Lighthizer's¹ taking the lead in that. But can you make any progress in non-trade issues until the trade issue is resolved?

SEC. POMPEO: Yeah. And we've made some. We've had other places where we've gone backwards. The Chinese have, frankly, been very helpful on North Korea. So, they have done more to enforce the U.N. Security Council resolutions on North Korea than ever, at any time in

¹ Robert Lighthizer is the United States Trade Representative.

history. They're helpful with us today in Afghanistan, on the project there too. It's something folks don't spend a lot of time thinking about. So far so good, with respect to respecting our sanctions enforcement on the Islamic Republic of Iran, although we sanctioned a Chinese company last week, or perhaps it was the week before for having violated those sanctions. So those are places we can work with China. There are lots of diplomatic fronts where we have – we don't share the same values, but we have overlapping interests. And we work on those problems.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: What would be the U.S. response if the Chinese were to send military into Hong Kong to put down the protest there?

SEC. POMPEO: Yeah. So, I never answer hypotheticals about what we'll do or won't do. [Laughter.] So well played. [Laughter.]

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Well, I thought I could – all right.

SEC. POMPEO: Having said that, look, we've been pretty clear. Protest is appropriate. We see this in the United States. I am confident there will be protesters when I drive through the building at State Department today. And we hope the Chinese will do the right thing with respect to respecting the agreements that are in place with respect to Hong Kong.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: OK. So, you have been to North Korea. And you've met with the leader of North Korea on a few occasions. And you've been there when the president has met with him. So, what type of person is he? Does he have great, interesting thoughts? Does he have – does he speak English? Do you communicate in English with him? And can you just kind of summarize what your impression is of the leader of North Korea?

SEC. POMPEO: Yeah. So, I've spent more time with him than any American. I passed Dennis Rodman on the last trip. [Laughter.]

MR. RUBENSTEIN: OK. OK.

SEC. POMPEO: So, he – look, he's bright. He has managed – he has managed to rise to the level of leadership in a difficult environment, where he was a very young man when his time came. From my very first interaction with him he's been very candid with me about the things that are important to him, the priority set, and how the negotiations might proceed. He's now repeated that he's prepared to denuclearize. It's now time to execute. And I hope that we can achieve that. I hope – I head to Asia tomorrow midday. I'll be in Bangkok for a couple days. We hope that we can have working-level discussions starting again very soon, so that we can unlock the Rubik's Cube. It's a real challenge that he is presented with as the leader of North Korea as well. We hope that he can see his way clear so we can get that brighter future that President Trump has talked about.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Do you expect a third summit to be announced anytime soon? The date and time of it?

SEC. POMPEO: There's nothing in the works.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: OK.

SEC. POMPEO: There's nothing planned.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: And why did the last summit end before the lunch even occurred? Why did it kind of abruptly end?

SEC. POMPEO: There was a bid-ask spread, to put it in economic terms. [Laughs.]

MR. RUBENSTEIN: All right.

SEC. POMPEO: We'd had a number – I can't go into all the details – but we had a number of conversations about a broad range of issues in the run-up to that. My team had worked very, very hard. And it just turned out that the idea that the leaders could bridge that gap in that moment turned out to not work that day.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: OK. But do you think the U.S. position has been that we would not lift sanctions until there was so-called denuclearization. But would you be willing to consider having the North Koreans keep whatever they have in nuclear weapons now and then lift sanctions if they didn't do more than they have now? Or is that something that's too hypothetical?

SEC. POMPEO: Too hypothetical.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Oh, OK. I didn't want to give you the answer, though. [Laughter.] So –

SEC. POMPEO: Yeah. Look, I'll say this: I've talked about this publicly a couple times. We hope that there are creative solutions to unlocking this. It is a very difficult challenge for each of us. We have to remember too these aren't U.S. sanctions. These are U.N. Security Council resolutions. These are global sanctions put on by every single country. And so, we are mindful that we are the steward for enforcing those.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Let's go to an easier part of the world, the Middle East, OK? [Laughter.] So, the Straits of Hormuz, are we committed to keeping open the Straits of Hormuz at any cost, militarily?

SEC. POMPEO: Yeah, we're going to keep them open. We're going to build out a maritime security plan. Countries from all across the world who have a vested interest in keeping those waterways open will participate. It will take more time than we wish it would take. But I'm very confident that the world understands its importance, that America is prepared to be a significant part of that, but we need countries from all across the world to assist us in protecting commercial transit. We'll be successful.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: But our position, I presume, is that if a U.S. ship were taken by the Iranians, we would presumably do something militarily, I guess. I don't know. But what about if a ship is taken that's a British ship or some other nationality? Are we not committed to recovering that ship or doing something to defend those ships?

SEC. POMPEO: Well, we've seen it. We've seen them take a British ship. So, this isn't a hypothetical. And we are – we are working – I was working with what – I guess I'm now working with my third British foreign minister since I've been the Secretary of State. But working with the British to find the solution to both, A, right that injustice and, second, prevent it from happening again. So, to establish deterrence. That's the mission set.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Now, recently you gave a visa for the foreign minister of Iran to come to the United States for a U.N. event. If you're familiar with that.

SEC. POMPEO: Yes. That's true. Yes.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: OK. So, when he was in the United States, were there any indirect or direct talks with him and the State Department about anything that you can talk about?

SEC. POMPEO: No talks.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: No talks? And – OK. Any –

SEC. POMPEO: Although he spoke. The American media decided to give him a megaphone to talk about things that are untrue going on in the Islamic Republic of Iran and gave him a chance to lie vociferously to the American people. I look forward to the chance to speak to the Iranian people in that same way, but truthfully. Tell them honestly about what's going on inside of their own country. So far, they've not taken me up on that offer.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Now, President Trump has imposed tough sanctions on Iran. Do you think they're going to have the effect of bringing Iran to the negotiating table or not?

SEC. POMPEO: You have to step back a little bit. Remember the objective. The objective is the National Security Strategy that was laid out now two and half years ago with respect to the Middle East. So, it's broader. We tend to focus on the tactical. We have to step back and think about what we're doing more broadly in the Middle East. With respect to Iran, it's the world's largest state sponsor of terror. It has the capacity to continue to work towards developing a nuclear weapon, which would cause proliferation risks all throughout the Middle East. And so, we are very concerned about that as well.

Our chosen strategy was to take 180 degree turn from what the previous administration has done. They created opportunity for enormous wealth for the kleptocrats in Iran, and for them to underwrite Hezbollah militias in Iraq, the Houthis in Yemen that are, even as we speak, preparing to continue their attacks on Saudi Arabia. We've decided to go the other way. We're trying to reduce their resources to conduct terror campaigns all around the world, build out their missile systems and their nuclear program. And we've been incredibly effective at that.

I remember, David, I'm sure no one in this room, but many here in Washington said that American sanctions alone won't work. Well, they've worked. We have taken over 95 percent of the crude oil that was being shipped by Iran all around the world – we have taken it off the market. And we have done so – I checked when I came in – Brent crude is at \$63.34 – 17-18 percent lower than when we withdrew from the JCPOA. So, we have – we have managed both to protect the economic growth that the world needs, while doing our best to deny resources to the Islamic Republic Iranian regime.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: The prospect of another Iranian agreement, one that's more favorable to your point of view and the president's point of view, is that likely to happen this year or next year? Or you just can't predict?

SEC. POMPEO: I don't do time. Timelines are a fool's errand in my business. [Laughs.] They were a fool's errand in my business when I ran a small company in Kansas, too.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: But the Iranians are now enriching uranium at a greater level than they were before. Do you worry that somebody, Israel, might attack the Iranian facilities, or you're not worried about that?

SEC. POMPEO: Yes, they're enriching more than they were under the agreement. Their temporary reduction in enriched uranium has now ended and they're moving back in the wrong direction. We're urging them to think about it. But for us, it's not about these levels set in the JCPOA.² It's about their capacity to build out a nuclear weapons system in a timeframe that matters to you, and your kids, and your grandkids. The previous agreement didn't remotely touch that.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: In the Middle East, do you see any prospect for peace between Israel and the Palestinians? There's been talk of a plan. And do you see any progress being made?

SEC. POMPEO: So, there's a reason it hasn't been solved for 40 years, or more. In the end, this will be the decision of the Prime Minister of Israel and the leadership in the West Bank and Gaza. I've been deeply involved in Mr. Kushner's³ efforts there. He'll be traveling – my team will be traveling with him in the coming days to flesh out for our partners in the region our path forward. In the end, we can present our vision, our plan, what we hope they will engage on. We hope we get the Gulf States to join us in that effort, and frankly the European countries too, to say this is the path forward. But in the end the decision about whether to make this fundamental rapprochement is up to those two countries, those two leaders.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: All right. But is our position, the United States government position, that we prefer a one-state solution or a two-state solution?

² The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, known commonly as the Iran nuclear deal or Iran deal, is an agreement reached in 2015 by Iran and the P5+1 (the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council—China, France, Russia, United Kingdom, United States—plus Germany) together with the European Union.

³ Jared Kushner is a senior advisor to his father-in-law, U.S. President Donald Trump.

SEC. POMPEO: You'll see our plan shortly.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: OK. Will you give us a hint, or no? [Laughter.]

SEC. POMPEO: No. We prefer what the Palestinians and the Israelis agree to, and what the nature of that relationship will look like.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: OK. Any progress, you think, between Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE in resolving their dispute? Are we in the middle of that? Of resolving it?

SEC. POMPEO: They're in the middle of it, right? [Laughs.]

MR. RUBENSTEIN: So, we're not in the middle of trying to resolve that?

SEC. POMPEO: We've made clear, we hope that they will join together. We think Gulf state unity on the issues that matter to America, American citizens, matters.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: What about Yemen? Any progress in reducing the conflicts there?

SEC. POMPEO: Yeah. Real progress. It is uneven. In the end, the player who will get to play the ultimate, final card there would be the Iranians. The Houthis have to make a decision. They've got to decide if they want to continue down the path of being disruptive and accepting Iranian missiles and launching them into Saudi Arabia.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Now, negotiations are underway with the Taliban in the Middle East. The U.S. is involved in that. Do you see any progress in reducing our need to be in Afghanistan? Anything in the near future?

SEC. POMPEO: Yeah, real progress. I try to not to do timelines, but I'm optimistic. We're not just negotiating with the Taliban. That's the story. The truth of the matter is, we're talking to all Afghans. So, we've spoken with President Ghani. I spoke to him on Friday night or Friday morning. We're speaking with the opposition, those folks that are not inside the government. We're speaking with Taliban officials. We have – Ambassador Khalilzad has worked all across Afghanistan with – when I was there last, I met with NGOs, I met with women's groups, a broad swath of Afghanistan. We want them to take their country back. And we want to reduce what is, for us, a tens of billions of dollars a year in expenditures and enormous risk to your kids and your grandkids, who are fighting for America. We think there's a path to reduce violence, achieve reconciliation, and still make sure that the American counterterrorism effort in Afghanistan has value and the potential to reduce risk here in the States.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Before the next presidential election in the United States, would you expect we'd reduce our troops in Afghanistan?

SEC. POMPEO: That's my directive from the president of the United States. He's been unambiguous: End the endless wars. Draw down, reduce. It won't just be us. Those of you

who have served know that Resolute Support⁴ has countries from all across Europe and around the world. We hope – we hope that overall the need for combat forces in the region is reduced. Yes, yes, it's not only my expectation, it's – it would be job enhancing. [Laughter.]

MR. RUBENSTEIN: OK. All right. So, on Russia. You've met with Mr. Putin many times, I assume.

SEC. POMPEO: A few times, yes, sir.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: And any impressions of him that you might convey? Is he very smart, very tough? Does he understand English? Do you convey your thoughts to him in English, or does he have an interpreter, or?

SEC. POMPEO: I think he speaks English plenty well. [Laughs.]

MR. RUBENSTEIN: OK.

SEC. POMPEO: Look, he's very clear about the things that are in Russia's interests, the things they're working on. You know, we had a strategic dialogue with them that we hope will build into something that handles a broad set of proliferation issues, not just nuclear proliferation issues but a broad array of proliferation. So, we hope China will join that set of conversations. We think today's – in today's world, these agreements need to have China be part of them. And I hope that President Putin will support us, and I think he will.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: For the time being, would you say that there is any progress in Ukraine, or anything related to Ukraine? Is that something that's just off the table right now in terms of the discussions?

SEC. POMPEO: So, we're engaging with the new government in Ukraine. They just finished up the parliamentary elections last week. New president. I hope that that will engender a more creative set of ideas about how to resolve this problem. The conflict in Ukraine is real. They're still fighting – not every day, but a lot. It's very real.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: For the Crimea, do you think that's never going to be returned to Ukraine?

SEC. POMPEO: The U.S. position is that that is unacceptable. Crimea must come back.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Now, there are protests now in Russia about local elections. And the leader of the protests is in jail, and there's been reports that he's been poisoned. We don't know if that's accurate or not. Do you have any comment on what's going on there? Is the United States protesting to the Russian government about what's occurring?

SEC. POMPEO: You know, I've read the reports. I don't have anything to add this morning. I think – I think everyone understands the U.S. position. This goes for – you asked about Hong

⁴ Resolute Support is a NATO-led mission to train, advise and assist the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces and institutions.

Kong earlier, Russia, all these places. We always support freedom of expression, freedom to practice one's religion, to live out one's conscience. We hope that for every citizen of the world.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: You were the head of the CIA at the beginning of this administration. Do you have any doubt that the Russians interfered with our last presidential election?

SEC. POMPEO: Oh, none. None.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: OK. So, have you conveyed that –

SEC. POMPEO: And the one before that, and the one before that, and the one before that, and the one in 2018. We had people forget, we've had an election since 2016. [Laughs.] I hear people say, oh, we have to protect 2020. Well, the good people who ran in 2018 cared a lot about us protecting that one. We did so very effectively, and we'll do so again in 2020.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: There is –

SEC. POMPEO: And it's not just – just the last thing – I know this town. I know exactly what will get reported. So just so you know, it ain't just Russia. That's bad English. I'll try and correct it. There are – there are more nations than just Russia who are attempting to undermine Western democracy. That has been true since the founders created this great nation. So, we have to be ever vigilant here.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: There is legislation that's passed the House, now in the Senate, to give more resources to keep the Russians from being able to do this again. Is the administration supportive of the legislation, which seems to be blocked right now in the Senate?

SEC. POMPEO: Yeah, I don't know the details of the legislation. I am convinced that the State Department has all the resources it needs to perform its part of that function. We have what we need. We have the authorities we need; we have the money we need. It's – the burden is on me to execute it.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: And have you communicated to Mr. Putin that we do not like what he's done before and he shouldn't do it again?

SEC. POMPEO: On a number of occasions.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: And what's his response?

SEC. POMPEO: Noted. [Laughter.] That's a – that's a diplomatic term for, I hear you, bro. [Laughter.]

MR. RUBENSTEIN: OK. So – OK. He doesn't admit anything, I assume. But, OK.

So, with respect to England, there's a new prime minister. You met Boris Johnson before.

SEC. POMPEO: I have. I met him when I was CIA director and I believe he was foreign secretary at the time, when I met him.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: OK. Does the current Trump administration support a Brexit, or would you prefer that there be a remain? Or do you not take a position on that?

SEC. POMPEO: I have confidence in the British people.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: OK. Now, the British ambassador had to resign because his cables were leaked by somebody. Do you tell your own ambassadors they should be a little bit more careful about what they say to you, because somebody could leak what they're writing? Is that a worry?

SEC. POMPEO: Not at all. And if I did, they'd ignore me. [Laughter.]

MR. RUBENSTEIN: OK.

SEC. POMPEO: I mean, right? They have a duty. They have a responsibility. Our task is for them to tell us what they're seeing. The power of the State Department is that we have these officers on the ground. Many countries can do policy and think tanks. But we have people every place in the world. We want them to give us the granularity that you can only get with those interactions. And we expect that they'll report them accurately, truthfully, candidly. And then our mission is to make sure they don't end up in The Washington Post.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Now, in respect to Mexico, we have been concerned about people coming over the border. Are you confident that the Mexican government is now doing what it can to keep more people from not coming over the border?

SEC. POMPEO: They are.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: So, they're doing enough, do you think, or you're –

SEC. POMPEO: No, it's not enough. And they still have a high side of 2,000 every day. That's unacceptable. And so, they need to do more. We need to do more. Congress needs to change the rules. We have to create a deterrence. It has to be the case that those who want to come here legally can, and those who want to come by some other mechanism choose not to, because they understand that they're not going to find a way. I remember this, as a member of Congress. People would call my office and say: Hey, we live in – pick a country around the world – and they'd say they want to come here and get citizenship. And you know, anyway, I won't tell you the joke I told, but the simplest way to do it would be to go to Mexico and come on.

But what you want to encourage them to do is to file their paperwork, go through the lawful process, become citizens. We're the most welcoming nation in the world. We will always be. But it is not the case that we can be lawless or have our sovereignty broken through having this mass immigration and an unlawful mechanism. It's truly – there's a national security risk, very, very broadly speaking. And so, when I speak with my Mexican counterparts – I was

in El Salvador last week speaking with my El Salvadorian counterpart – who understands whose challenge it is – it’s theirs, not ours. We got to get this right.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: So, in Mexico and Canada we have redone NAFTA, now USMCA.⁵ But Congress hasn’t passed it. Are you worried that Congress might not pass that legislation?

SEC. POMPEO: I hope they will. I hope they will. The President’s doing everything he can to create growth here in the United States of America, and the USMCA would contribute to that substantially. And so, I hope they’ll pass it. I’m out of – I don’t do vote counting anymore. I did that for six years, and so I’m out.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: OK. Speaking of south of the border, Venezuela. Would the U.S. send troops in if that was necessary to keep further violence from occurring there?

SEC. POMPEO: So, you started trying to get me at the beginning, now you’re trying at the end. The President has said pretty clearly, we’re going to do all that it takes to make sure the Venezuelan people get democracy back. And that’s the – that’s the mission set. We’re closer today than we were several months ago. But in the end, we’ll do our part. And the nations of the region – we built out a great coalition from members of the OAS,⁶ to what we call the Lima Group,⁷ to 56 or 58 other countries who are joining us and who understand Maduro⁸ is not the duly elected president. Progress every day.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Now, President Trump has sometimes tweeted things that are not favorable about some people working for him. He’s never tweeted anything unfavorable about you.

SEC. POMPEO: It’s early. It’s early. [Laughter.]

MR. RUBENSTEIN: So, what is the secret of your success in your relationship with the president? You didn’t know him before he was elected, did you?

SEC. POMPEO: I did not. I met him the day I interviewed to be CIA director.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: And who recommended you to be CIA director?

SEC. POMPEO: I don’t know for sure. I don’t know.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: You mean, the CIA doesn’t have the ability to figure out who recommended you? [Laughter, applause.] You should figure out that.

⁵ USMCA - United States–Mexico–Canada Agreement (would replace NAFTA – North American Free Trade Agreement)

⁶ OAS – Organization of American States

⁷ The Lima Group is comprised of 14 countries (originally 12) that seeks to mediate the crisis in Venezuela.

⁸ Nicolás Maduro Moros serves as president of Venezuela (since 2013).

SEC. POMPEO: You'd never believe that the CIA only does foreign espionage. [Laughter.] I've never been able to convince people of that.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: OK. But somebody recommended you. You had an interview with him.

SEC. POMPEO: I think the Vice President was likely the person who I had known and served with as a member of Congress.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: And did you say: I like the CIA job, but I'd like to be Secretary of State? Or this came as a surprise to you?

SEC. POMPEO: It was a complete surprise to me. I was – and I was honored to serve as the director of the Central Intelligence Agency.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: OK. So, some people say that you should run for the Senate from Kansas. In fact, Mitch McConnell I think has twisted your arm a few times to do that. Can you say definitively that you will not run? The filing date is June of 2020, you probably know. So, any –

SEC. POMPEO: I didn't. But thank you for reminding me. [Laughter.]

MR. RUBENSTEIN: OK. So, would you consider that? Or are you putting that off the table for a while? Or?

SEC. POMPEO: It's off the table. As a practical matter, I'm going to serve as Secretary of State every day that I get the chance to do so. Look, we all serve at the pleasure of the President. You talked about that Director Coats,⁹ who I have enormous respect for, will be leaving the administration. He serve nobly. There is a time for everyone. And I hope I get to do this for a while longer.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: My experience is that sometimes when people get close to a president, they see the job up close, they say, well, I can do that job too. Has that occurred to you, that maybe you could do the job? [Laughter.] And would you have any interest in running for president at some point in your life?

SEC. POMPEO: I try to answer this consistently: I have never been able to predict what my next gig will be. And I suspect that's the case with respect to this. I will say this, the service that I have had the chance to do – I'm almost 20 years now in federal service. Eighteen years of federal service, in my time in the Army, and then in Congress, and now in the executive branch. It has been a blessing. I hope I have left things a little bit better. And I do feel an obligation. America has given me an awful lot. And if I thought I could do a good turn, there's nothing I wouldn't consider doing for America.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Right. OK. So, let's suppose the president is reelected. Would you be willing to serve as secretary of state for one, two, three, four years of a second term? Or have you thought about that yet?

⁹ Dan Coats is the Director of National Intelligence.

SEC. POMPEO: Haven't thought about it yet. You know, hard to know. Hard to answer those questions. The real question is would the president still want Mike Pompeo as his secretary of state.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: OK. So, when you have decisions with the president, meetings with him, is he best with oral communications, written communications? What's the process by which decisions are made? Is it through the NSC¹⁰ or informal?

SEC. POMPEO: Yeah. So, there's a very robust NSC process. When I brief him myself, I always prefer to have a document. It's the way I prefer to receive information. So, I almost always bring something – a one-page summary at the very least, that says here's the outline of what it is that I think are the priorities now. We should think about how we should frame this particular problem. And then the president does like to engage in oral exchanges. And I've found them to be elucidating for myself. I often learn things as well. He's very focused on where the money is, and how we use economic leverage to achieve our diplomatic ends.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Now, except when Henry Kissinger was both secretary of state and national security advisor at the same time, generally there's been some tension between secretaries of state and national security advisors. How is your relationship with John Bolton?¹¹

SEC. POMPEO: Yeah, I mean, look, there's always tension among leaders of different organizations. We come at these things from a different viewpoint. Ambassador Bolton has his responsibility to try and make sure all the ideas are vetted and get to the president. Secretary of treasury, secretary of energy, the intelligence community each have their mission sets. There's – we have robust, lively debates. I agree with each of them often and disagree with most of them sometimes.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: OK. So, we have a few dozen ambassadors here. What would you give them as insight as the best way to influence the president of the United States on foreign policy matters?

SEC. POMPEO: Yeah. Deliver value. That's what I talk about every day. It's what you all do every day in your business. It's not about does he like Mike, or does he like Al, or Alice. It's about did you show up with an informed, fact-based theory that can deliver the outcomes that are in the president's, commander's intent? If we do that, if we show up with the best answer, we'll drive policy. If we don't, we'll just be banging our gums.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Now, there are reports today that the new head of the Central Intelligence – or, the DNI will be John Ratcliffe from Congress – who you served with in Congress. Some people say he is too political for that position. You've served in CIA. Do you believe he is too political for that position?

¹⁰ National Security Council

¹¹ John Bolton is the U.S. National Security Advisor.

SEC. POMPEO: Yeah, I know John some. His first term, I think, was my final term in Congress. So, I know him reasonably well. He's very smart. I'm very confident he'll do a good job. I remember people saying I'd be too political to be the CIA director too. I hope that history will inform us all that that wasn't the case, that I did my job, that I delivered on behalf of the American people in an appropriate way, and didn't allow politics to interfere with delivering important, timely, fact-based intelligence to the President of the United States.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: So, in your career, you were first in your class at West Point. So how do you become first in your class at West Point? That's pretty tough. I mean, what happened to all the other people who were second, third, and fourth? [Laughter.] Did they become anything? And –

SEC. POMPEO: So, one of them is the secretary of defense.¹² [Laughter.] Right? So, he's a classmate of mine as well. I gave him a hard time about our relative order of finish, yes.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: OK. Now, you went to Harvard Law School. Why did you abandon the practice of law?

SEC. POMPEO: I had a great opportunity. I was practicing law at Williams & Connolly here. Had great partners I worked for. Unlike many, I actually enjoyed my time there. I was older. I had gone to law school a little bit later. But I had a chance to start a business in Kansas with three of my best friends in the whole world. And so, started a company that was a machine shop in Wichita, Kansas. And spent the next 15 years –

MR. RUBENSTEIN: But you once told me you were negotiating with somebody on the opposite side on that deal, and that person wound up to be your wife. Is that –

SEC. POMPEO: It's true. It's true. She took my money twice. [Laughter.]

MR. RUBENSTEIN: OK. So, what is the best part about being secretary of state?

SEC. POMPEO: I love Susan, by the way. We're still married and everything's good. [Laughter.] Yeah.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: You had to say that, otherwise –

SEC. POMPEO: I did. I have friends in the room who are texting her right now. Yes.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: OK. All right. So, the best part of being secretary of state is what?

SEC. POMPEO: You get a chance to help ordinary Americans understand what we're doing and try and deliver them an environment where fewer and fewer of their kids have to be in armed conflict. That's our mission set every day, to get American outcomes through diplomacy.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: And what's the worst part about being secretary of state?

¹² Mark Esper was sworn in as secretary of defense in July 2019.

SEC. POMPEO: Haven't figured that out yet.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: OK.

SEC. POMPEO: I'm enjoying every minute of what I'm doing. I truly feel that I've been given this remarkable privilege to serve. And trying to do my best to deliver on that every day.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: The State Department itself, are you involved with a lot of the foreign service officers? Are you trying to encourage them to be more involved in the State Department? Or how do you try to deal with the foreign service officers?

SEC. POMPEO: Yeah. Look, one of the things that I love doing is leading teams, leading organizations. It's what I loved when I was a platoon leader, when I ran the aerospace in Wichita, Kansas. And so, when I came in at the very beginning, we had deep plans for how to make the foreign service officers, our civil servants, our local employed staff better. So, we've got real training programs in the works. We've developed what we call the ethos for the 21st century diplomat. Each of which is aimed at making – these folks will be there long after I'm gone, many of them, right? They came here before me and they will be here after I'm gone. I want to make sure that they have the opportunity to grow and learn and deliver on behalf of America in their space. And so, we have an obligation to take good care of them, to make sure they get the training and education they need as well.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: So, let me just conclude. We are out of time. I notice you have very colorful socks on. Is that part of your diplomatic – are they symbolic of anything?

SEC. POMPEO: It is. It is. I bring a little bit of DOD with me everywhere. Yes, these are army soldiers, toy soldiers. It's a bit of an inside joke. And I have now, like, 40 pairs of these, so.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Forty pairs?

SEC. POMPEO: Yes. I have friends from all across the world sent them after the first photo with – it was a picture when I was with my North Korean counterpart with these, and everybody thought it was funny, so.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Now, you're leaving when? The United States, you're leaving?

SEC. POMPEO: I leave tomorrow midday.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: And how do you deal with jetlag when you're secretary of state?

SEC. POMPEO: Just keep going. [Laughter.] You all travel, everybody travels a lot. I'm just – I'm pretty fortunate I can – I can sleep just about anywhere – get a couple hours' sleep and be ready to – ready to get on. It doesn't bother me.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: OK. So, thank you very much for your service and thank you very much for coming here today.

SEC. POMPEO: Thank you all very much. [Applause.]



Michael R. Pompeo was sworn in as Secretary of State on April 26, 2018. He previously served as Director of the Central Intelligence Agency from January 2017 to April 2018.

Prior to joining the Trump Administration, Mr. Pompeo was serving in his fourth term as congressman from Kansas' 4th District. He served on the House Intelligence Committee, as well as the Energy and Commerce Committee and House Select Benghazi Committee.

Prior to his service in Congress, Mr. Pompeo founded Thayer Aerospace, where he served as CEO for more than a decade. He later became President of Sentry International, an oilfield equipment manufacturing, distribution, and service company.

Mr. Pompeo graduated first in his class at the United States Military Academy at West Point in 1986 and served as a cavalry officer patrolling the Iron Curtain before the fall of the Berlin Wall. He also served with the 2nd Squadron, 7th Cavalry in the US Army's Fourth Infantry Division.

After leaving active duty, Mr. Pompeo graduated from Harvard Law School, having been an editor of the Harvard Law Review.

Mr. Pompeo was born on December 30, 1963, in Orange, California. He is married to Susan Pompeo and has one son, Nick.