

Transcript: Mike Pompeo In-Depth on Biden's National Security Priorities

FEATURING MIKE POMPEO, FRED FLEITZ,
AND DAVID WURMSER



Adam Savit (00:08):

Good afternoon everyone. My name is Adam Savit and welcome back to the Center for Security Policy for our webinar series. Today's a special program. We're honored to welcome our guest, Secretary Mike Pompeo for an in-depth look at national security policy under the Biden Administration. The program will be co-moderated by my center colleagues, Fred Fleitz and David Wurmser. To check out a schedule of our regular webinars, go to securefreedom.org and check under the webinar tab. I'll also give you a preview at the end of today's broadcast.

Adam Savit (00:39):

Please note that you are in listen-only mode, but you can submit your text questions in the Q&A box on your GoToWebinar panel. I'll read as many questions as possible at the end of the program. This webinar is being recorded and will be posted later today on our YouTube channel, youtube.com/securefreedom, and on our website at securefreedom.org. With that, I'll hand it to our center President and CEO, Fred Fleitz.

Fred Fleitz (01:06):

Adam, thank you very much. I'd like to thank our viewers for joining this crucial webinar which comes at a time when Americans have a lot of questions about this surge in violence by the Palestinians against Israel. They're hearing mixed signals from the Biden Administration and a lot of biased anti-Israel coverage in the news media. Americans want to hear the truth and what's really happening concerning the security of one of our closest and most important allies, the state of Israel.

Fred Fleitz (01:36):

Protecting the crucial US-Israel relationship is one of the Center for Security Policy's most important priorities. So we are so fortunate to have a man with us today who helped lead one of the most successful Middle East policies, pro-Israel policies in our nation's history as Secretary of State, and that is Secretary of State Mike Pompeo. Secretary Pompeo, welcome.

Mike Pompeo (01:58):

Thank you Fred. It's great to be with you. Adam, thanks for the kind introduction. Looking forward to the conversation today.

Fred Fleitz (02:05):

Now, Secretary Pompeo was America's 70th secretary of state from 2018 until 2021. Prior to that he was President Trump's Director of the CIA. And as Secretary of State and at the CIA he had many accomplishments advancing our national security, helping President Trump with a tougher policy against China to protect our security and economic interests, a determination that the Chinese government's brutal oppression of the weaker Muslims constituted genocide, the maximum pressure campaign against Iran, helping President Trump lower tensions with North Korea, a much tougher policy on Russia which included sanctions, promoting peace and security in the

Middle East, and improving America's reputation as a decisive superpower.

Fred Fleitz (02:52):

Joining me today in the questions will be my colleague, Dr. David Wurmser. David is a center senior analyst and director of the center's program on global anti-Semitism and the US-Israel relationship. He also is a senior fellow at the [inaudible 00:03:06] Policy Center; David has a long resume of foreign policy jobs helping protect our country, and this includes 11 years of intelligence experience in the US navy reserves. He holds a PhD in foreign policy in Middle East affairs from John Hopkins University. David, welcome.

David Wurmser (03:24):

Thank you. Thank you Fred.

Fred Fleitz (03:26):

So Mr. Secretary, I'm going to start off with one question and then I'm going to let our resident Israel expert take over, and we may ask some non-Israel questions later if we have time. Mr. Secretary, you helped implement an extraordinarily successful Middle East policy that embraced Israel as a crucial US ally, improved prospects for peace in Middle East. The Trump Administration left President Biden with a much more peaceful and stable and hopeful Middle East than it was left by the Obama Administration. Yet, Joe Biden with only 122 days in office, we're now seeing the worst outbreak of violence against Israel in decades. US-Israel relations are extremely strained. How did the peace that you and President Trump left for President Biden dissipate so quickly, and what must President Biden do to restore peace and stability in the Middle East?

Mike Pompeo (04:21):

Well Fred, there's multiple pieces to this, but I think it's worth resetting where we entered this in 2017. You'll remember ISIS controlled a significant piece of Syria. Barack Obama had walked away from his red line there. That sent a real message of weakness to the Middle East. So we began to try and restore trust and confidence and build out alliances there so we wouldn't have to send our young kids to fight and die in that place.

Mike Pompeo (04:48):

There were three pieces to this. There were more but three large pieces to this, the first was and you hinted at this, we made clear that Israel had the right to defend itself every day and always do, whatever it took to get that right, and that the United States would be its friend and ally. When I was a CIA director, we worked closely with our counterparts. The President made the decision to live up to the promise that he had made, which was to move the US embassy to Jerusalem. We acknowledged everybody knew was true that Israelis were going to occupy the Golan Heights and we're going to control that real estate. We acknowledged this was a rightful part of Israelite. I made a statement from the State Department that not every settlement is unlawful. I mentioned those. There were many others where it was a clear demonstration of resolve between the United States and the lone democracy in

the Middle East, Israel, working together to keep the Middle East more prosperous and secure.

Mike Pompeo (05:40):

Second, we weren't the first. In fact, we were the sixth administration to acknowledge that Iran is a terrorist regime. But we made clear we were going to respond to that in a forceful way, and we developed a campaign of pressure on the regime that changed the outlook for countries all across the region. They knew that the United States was going to work tirelessly to deny the Iranian regime, the money and dollars it needed to fuel not only its nuclear program, but its terror campaign around the world, its capacity to fire ballistic missiles at range with accuracy, all of the elements of power were going to be denied to the Iranian regime until they conformed to a series of conditions that we laid out for them. And part of that was walking away from the JCPOA, a nuclear deal that wasn't worth frankly the paper that it was written on.

Mike Pompeo (06:29):

Last, that we built out what ultimately became the Abraham Accords. We laid out a vision for peace in the Middle East, including a path forward for the Palestinians which will I'm sure spend a lot of time talking about today, a path forward for the Palestinians that says you can have a better life but your corrupt regime intent on terror in Gaza and your corrupt regime that undermines Israeli sovereignty in the West Bank are going to have to change their ways and we're not going to let that stand in the way of us building out a peace relationship, a set of strategic understandings between Arab states and Israel that will further prosperity and peace.

Mike Pompeo (07:03):

Those were the three central elements and what you asked was how did it come undone. And the answer is the Biden Administration undid or attempted to undo nearly every one of those by sitting in Vienna, handing the Iranians billions of dollars as the looker to convince them to come back into this failed nuclear deal that had no chance of permanently stopping Iran from getting a nuclear weapon or a nuclear weapons program, and then the absence of the clear commitment early on that said, "No, we're going to have conversations with you." Remember how long it took President Biden to just make the first phone call to Prime Minister Netanyahu. Those all send signals. Those actions sent signals to the Middle East, to the Iranian terrorists that are sponsored by the regime in Iran that said this is a green light, and you see the results of this.

David Wurmser (07:55):

Thank you Secretary. You've already answered a number of the questions I was going to ask. But let me start sort of burrowing down a little bit in the current conflagration more specifically. So you had a situation where after Israel withdrew from Gaza, you had in 2008, '10, basically every two years, you had this rather consistent cycle of violence, not cycle but escalation of Hamas attacks on Israel, each round being more deadly than the last, and the last was in 2014. So suddenly we've now had seven years of peace. I'd also note that inside Israel, terrorism, violent actions against Israelis had trickled to near zero by the end of the administration.

David Wurmser (08:49):

So one specific angle I want to get into is how much do you think the expectation of the Biden Administration taking a neutral position, falling back on the usual Washington or the traditional policy in Washington of calling immediately for a de-escalation of conflict and a tamping down of everything rather than making it clear we stand strategically with an Israeli victory, how much do you think the expectation of that drove Iranians, Abu Mazen himself who was in some ways the instigator of this current round and Hamas to think they have an opportunity here, regardless of militarily how it turns out, to drive a wedge between the United States and Israel, and how much do you think that expectation drove the explosion?

Mike Pompeo (09:44):

David, it's always hard to know precisely what underlays these issues and the timing of them. But what is unambiguously clear is that the Iranians understand power and force and determination. And deterrence is possible with respect to the regime. We demonstrated that time and time again, whether it was the strike that we took when the Syrians used chemical weapons, when we took out Qasem Soleimani when he was threatening to kill even more Americans than he had already killed. The Iranians understand power and deterrence and they can sniff weakness 5,000 miles away.

Mike Pompeo (10:19):

And so I think your point is well taken. The Iranians now know that the administration is going to sit down with them. It's the same cast of characters, Robert O'Malley, Wendy Sherman, Susan Rice, John Kerry. They're all back. I joke, when Vice President said, "We're going to bring America back." Yeah, you brought them back, all right. And what did you beget? You beget war. I remember David so well, I remember John Kerry on TV talking about how either this deal, the JCPOA or war. Well, we withdrew from the JCPOA. There was no war. Remember they said if you don't solve the problem with the Palestinians, there'll be war. We didn't solve that, as you can see, the conflict remains, but we didn't have a war. We built out a stability, a stable peace framework for the Middle East.

Mike Pompeo (11:07):

The sense of understanding that the expectation that the Hamas terrorists would have had. Remember, these are ideologues. The Iranian regime, these are not pragmatists. These are ideologues who believe deeply in the extermination of the Jewish state. So when they think that they have weakness in the United States, when they have a sense that the first thing out of the bag that's going to get said isn't, "You know Israel has every right to defend itself. They should go take care of this problem set," period, full stop. When they think there'll be a whisper on the end of that, a whisper that says, there's some moral equivalence between these terrorists, Hamas, whose mission set is to kill civilians, to drive international outrage, and the Israelis who do everything they can not to kill civilians, when they sense there'll be an expression of moral equivalence such as asking for a ceasefire, they know this is not a red light, this is not something that concerns them and they are likely to do just the kind of violence you're seeing today.

David Wurmser (12:07):

Yeah. I mean, it reminds me of the expression the Israelis are using missiles to defend their civilians. Hamas is using their civilians to defend their missiles. I want to go back a little bit historically because I see it in Israeli debate and in the debate in the region and being brought up here mostly by the critics of the Trump Administration. They say that a lot of this has to do with the frustration that was building in the Palestinians because the Israelis refused to engage them and refused to negotiate and the United States support for that which I know is not true. So I want to see what you can tell us about how extensively the Trump Administration did actually try to bring around the Palestinians and offer them a deal that they could live with which now historically the narrative is trying to be rewritten that was never an attempt.

Mike Pompeo (13:15):

Yeah. David, that's a good question. I've seen that narrative. It's in The New York Times, it's in The Washington Post, it's in the left media everywhere. That media has often been very pro-Palestinian for sure. So there's nothing new in that sense. Look, I spent an awful lot of time, I got to know Abu Mazen pretty well. I spent a lot of time with [inaudible 00:13:35]. I know these people. We laid out a case. You can see it. It was a public framework that the Palestinians could have at least, at least done what we asked. Our ask was really simple, sit down and talk. Our ask wasn't to accept what we put on the table. We said, "This is the framework we're going to begin the discussions from. You can show up with anything or nothing, but sit down and have a conversation."

Mike Pompeo (13:56):

And look, they weren't about to do that. They weren't about to do that because they are benefiting from the corruption that takes place. They knew that we weren't going to turn back on the funding to the Palestinians, to Umrah, that we had cut off until they actually came to the table with a serious proposition. We put a proposal for that I don't think anybody can deny would have made life better for Palestinians living in the West Bank, roads and buildings and things that would have given them jobs and opportunities.

Mike Pompeo (14:23):

This is what good leaders would do. They would figure out a way to get the best deal that they could possibly get, and then deliver good outcomes for their people. The Palestinians during our watch had no interest in this whatsoever. It was no, no, no to everything we proffered.

David Wurmser (14:39):

Got it. That's an important point that historically should be recorded well.

Mike Pompeo (14:46):

And David, the last point there too is, remember, the other thing that this administration did is they turned back on the funding. They told the Palestinians we're going to pay the money. And the idea was if we pay this money,

then there'll be peace. If we cut the money off, boy, there's going to be war. I remember that. Some of my team, State Department and CIA, an analyst said, "If we cut off this funding to the Palestinians, we'll create the next intifada, we'll create the next set of violent eruptions or terror inside of Israel." Nice. Like you remember these from the Obama years. We did that. We did that. We made very clear we're not going to use American taxpayers dollar to underwrite terror regimes, and when we did that, they understood we were serious and we didn't have the violence that The New York Times and Washington Post so hastily predicted wrongly.

David Wurmser (15:37):

Absolutely. Absolutely. So let me turn to a difficult question that I've asked Israelis, senior Israelis, and not getting a very good answer from them either, is so in these rounds between fighting that Hamas did up until a year before the Trump Administration which led to the longest sort of cease fire or quiet in this various cycles, Hamas managed effectively to use money from Iran and elsewhere to increase its capabilities and in the end, now what we're seeing is a very dangerous entity, not quite the level of Hezbollah but certainly way beyond where it was.

David Wurmser (16:21):

The Israelis since 2006, I believe they've effectively deterred Hezbollah in a way that they didn't deter Hamas, but at the same time we're seeing the build-up of Hezbollah consistently throughout this whole period. So beyond the issue of deterrence, how would you handle Hezbollah now? We're seeing that the quiet period is not really a strategically stagnant period. Hamas and Hezbollah use it effectively in fact. So how would you handle Hezbollah now?

Mike Pompeo (16:57):

It's a good question. The risk that Hezbollah decides to join this fight is real. They are performing calculations. We have seen in open press reporting that their leader Nasrallah was talking with the head of the IRGC Quds Force. I'm sure they weren't talking about the nice weather. We know this. We know that Hezbollah has been able to build out their capabilities, including precision guided munitions in the north to threaten Israel in ways that these rockets from Hamas cannot.

Mike Pompeo (17:28):

And so this challenge. We took a singular approach. We said we're going to deny them wealth and money. To cut that off completely, to stop that in its entirety is, well, not impossible, but we know that Hezbollah fighters were receiving only a fraction of their salaries for the last, really, it was 18 months or so of our time. It took us a while to get these sanctions in full force in effect and then of course they don't really begin to grip hold on the regime's capabilities for us some time after that. We think Hezbollah was headed in a bad direction. We now think they're likely to get hundreds of millions of dollars worth of additional cash injections as a result of the reentry of the United States into the JCPOA. This will further fuel Hezbollah's capabilities.

Mike Pompeo (18:13):

The greater challenge, the challenge that you're not getting good answers from the Israelis on is how do you stop them from building up? I think there's two answers. One, Israel needs to continue to build its defense capabilities out so that while Hezbollah is building increased offensive tools, Israel is doing the things it needs to ensure that those tools can't actually do real harm. Israel has certainly done that. And then second, in the end the Iranian regime must be forced to change its ways.

Mike Pompeo (18:39):

So long as Iran has money, its ideological drive to destroy Israel is not likely to change. You have to cut off their capacity to continue to underwrite these terrorists, not only Hezbollah, not only Hamas and the Palestinian Islamic jihad, but the Houthis. I guess they're not terrorists anymore. I thought they were terrorists a couple hundred days ago. Turns out maybe not. By the way, not just the Trump Administration. From 1997 on, they've been designated terrorists, and now somehow we're going to decide the Houthis that are firing missiles every day into Riyadh where there are Americans. I'm sure David, you've traveled there. Fred, I know you probably have as well.

Mike Pompeo (19:17):

Until we take down the Iranian regime's capacity to inflict these terror militias on the world, it's very difficult for any nation, including Israel, to completely defend against their capacity to do this build-up. That leaves you with deterrence. We have reached a pretty good place. In the end we needed more time to convince the Iranian regime it must change its ways.

David Wurmser (19:39):

I'll turn to Iran in just one second because we're already beginning to broach it, but just one last thing on the Arab-Israeli. It's been sort of an icon of peacemaking and policy in Washington since really the '80s, late '80s that some form of state or something, a two-state solution of some sort should arise that will bring about peace. And we have derived from that the Oslo process where Israel gave up and we had partly derived from that the Israeli withdrawal from Gaza. Both have resulted in explosions of violence rather than peace. How much do you think the United States ought to continue with that core framework concept of a two-state solution?

David Wurmser (20:36):

I mean, the Trump Administration was still within that framework, but it did understand that it didn't really have to choose between the Israelis and the Arabs, that actually being pro-Israeli helped with other Arabs as well and it improved a regional climate that led to peace despite what the current Administration's press office is saying that these were empty peace treaties. They were actually very genuine moves forward in creating a regional climate of peace.

David Wurmser (21:07):

But that said, at the core we never really got anywhere with the two-state solution. Do you think we should continue along that path in a slightly different way or do you think we need to start thinking creatively about different possible solutions?

Mike Pompeo (21:23):

David, I think the solution that we proposed was actually different. You'll note that the 70th Secretary of State didn't commute between Jerusalem and Ramallah trying to figure out where some line on a map would be, trying to negotiate some technical outcome which essentially has to follow an ideological commitment from the Palestinians that says, no, it's acceptable that there will at least be one state called Israel. This ideology, you can't walk away from this while they cling. And if you look at the covenants that Hamas has in place and you look at ... Until they acknowledge that Israel has a right to exist, there's no map making, there's nothing to really hold on to.

Mike Pompeo (22:05):

We proposed something that was inside the traditional framework in terms of a two-state solution but acknowledged that those two states would be radically different. We would give maximum autonomy to the Palestinians and the West Bank every place that we could. We would ensure that they had the ability to have jobs and work and roads that were there and security and privacy for their own people, all of those things we could deliver. And I'm convinced that the Israelis would have when they sat down and had conversations with the Palestinians would have been able to deliver as well. But that Israel was going to need to maintain the capacity to defend itself. And you can see today precisely why Israel will never give that up and Israel should never be asked to give that up. We wouldn't ask that of any other nation state.

Mike Pompeo (22:47):

So I do think there is a framework there, but it will have to begin with leadership in the West Bank that is not corrupt, that is not intent on simply throwing Molotov cocktails into the negotiation but rather is serious about acknowledging Israel's right to exist, and working on a solution that provides maximum sovereignty inside of the West Bank, it's achievable. This will result in there being two separate governing institutions, and that's completely appropriate and probably the most likely path to not having violent events erupt cyclically like you're seeing today.

David Wurmser (23:21):

Absolutely. So let me turn to Iran quickly. We've sort of scraped against the JCPOA, and there are currently all these ... Obviously there's negotiations going on for a re-entry of the United States to the JCPOA, which seemed at best to be JCPOA level, maybe JCPOA minus. How would you do this differently and is ... especially now given the experience of what we have with what's going on with Hamas and Hezbollah in Syria and where obviously that money that was released by the JCPOA went, how would you approach this, negotiations with Iran differently, how would you, even if you would engage? And ultimately the question of how would you approach the Iranian

regime. Is it really something we can ultimately come to terms with them on through deterrence or some other such way, or do we have to think about a more aggressive policy of destabilization in Iran?

Mike Pompeo (24:25):

We don't know. We weren't able to test that theory in its entirety, David. I don't know the answer to that. President Trump made clear we were prepared to talk to them. Look, we spoke with Chairman Kim. I met with the Taliban. We met with a lot of bad actors along the way. But at no time did we ever give up on the things that mattered to America, the things that kept American people safe. We were deeply focused on ensuring that the outcomes that we got there achieved America's vital national security interest and that of our allies and friends and partners.

Mike Pompeo (24:53):

So our negotiations would have been broached very, very differently. We would have had the chance to have this conversation only with the condition that the sanctions weren't going to be released until we had a path which could create, what's the right way to think about it, maximal certainty that the Iranians had given up on their ambition to have a nuclear weapon. That would have had to include not enriching because as we've seen, if you have the capacity to enrich, you can just spin the centrifuges a bit faster and it doesn't take long until you can have something that begins to approach weapons grade uranium.

Mike Pompeo (25:27):

So the negotiations that we would have had would have happened against the backdrop of American strength, of American sanctions, of a coalition that isolated the Islamic Republic of Iran. I mean remember, I don't know how many times I heard from people, "Boy, America is going it alone. President Trump and Mike Pompeo don't care about coalitions." Iran was never as isolated as it was on January 19th of 2020. Arab nations, nations all across the world, many European nations, even if not the E3, many European nations understood that Iran was the central destabilizing force in the Middle East as well and were prepared to join us in executing on the vision that we had for how to convince the regime to change its direction.

Mike Pompeo (26:12):

I don't know, David, I don't know how that would have happened precisely. I do not know if the Ayatollah would have ultimately made the choice to drink from the poison chalice, or when he would have done so. But we knew this much. We knew to the extent that we allowed commerce to flow back into Iran, that we allowed the sanctions regime to be lifted, that we were going to empower the worst of the worst inside of Iran to continue to build out their missile program, their terror campaign, and ultimately chip away and chip a path towards their nuclear program as well.

David Wurmser (26:45):

Thank you. I just, I'd add one small thing, is that the peace accords, the Abraham Accords, certainly showed the Iranians visibly how isolated they were becoming. There was an operational strategic structure emerging on their borders that drove home the point. So there is a strategic dimension also to the Abraham Accords that what people miss.

David Wurmser (27:09):

I'd like to turn this over to Fred Fleitz. Fred, I think wants to ask a few questions beyond the Middle East. So Fred.

Fred Fleitz (27:18):

Okay, thank you. Well, Mr. Secretary, we can't let you go without asking about China, since you were so instrumental in standing up to the threat from China and the Chinese Communist Party. And I want to first ask you about something unusual that happened on January 20th 2021 when 28 Trump officials, including yourself, were sanctioned by the Chinese Communist Party and barred from entering China or from dealing with Chinese companies. I'm sure you regard this as a badge of honor, but could you explain for the audience why is it that the Chinese government hates Trump officials so much, and why were they so eager for Joe Biden to win the 2020 election?

Mike Pompeo (27:59):

Well Fred, it's funny. The next day after the sanctuaries were announced, my son's fiance called me and asked if she was marrying into the sanctions' regime. And I told her I had looked at it formally but she should count on taking any trips to China before that big wedding day.

Mike Pompeo (28:17):

Look, there were two reasons that they came after us on January 21st. The first is that we were literally the only administration in the last 40 years that was prepared to call what we were seeing happening to the United States from China as adversary. We were first to acknowledge that we were going to have to confront it, whether it was the intellectual property and the tens of millions of American jobs lost as a result of that, whether it was the United Front operations conducted here inside the United States. President Trump put tariffs on the former. I closed the consulate in Houston to address the latter. Whether it was their military buildup and their surveillance state. Whether it was the genocide in the west, we were going to in a full-throated way deliver to the world an understanding that says if you want to continue to live in a society, a global world that resonates with western values, state sovereignty, the rule of law, contracts that can be honored between countries, international organizations that weren't corrupt, then you're going to have to choose as between the west and China. No administration before us had confronted that.

Mike Pompeo (29:29):

So I was the point man to spread that message around the world, whether it was trying to get Huawei out of people's telecommunication systems via something we called the Clean Network, or whether it was the work that we did to support the people of Hong Kong and the people in Taiwan, all of those actions came together to present an idea, a western idea about how the world ought to work. And they didn't like that. They hadn't been confronted. We'd had appeased them for 40 years and we said not anymore.

Mike Pompeo (29:57):

Second, the other reason they put those sanctions, this is more tactical, they were sending a clear message to my successor. They were sending a message to all the senior leaders in the Biden Administration that says if you want to go back into the private sector and make a whole lot of money like you were doing on January 19th, you better be really careful in how you treat China while you're in office. Think about that Fred. Think how outrageous that is. They are essentially performing a form of coercion and extortion against American government officials saying, "We're going to deny you the ability to make a living, if you're not careful in how you perform your government service." That is outrageous, it is dangerous, and I am counting on the Biden Administration officials to run through the stop sign.

Fred Fleitz (30:39):

I want to ask about something that in my opinion was one of your greatest achievements as Secretary, and that was designating the persecution of the Uyghur muslims as genocide under the 1948 Genocide Convention. I don't think most Americans realize what a significant action this was and why the US is now committed to taking serious action on this matter. Could you talk about that?

Mike Pompeo (31:03):

Well Fred, first, it's important to understand what this means. We don't declare genocide in the United States very often, that it's happening. We've done it only just a handful of times. When we do, at least each time that I've seen the Secretary of State's decision, it's thoughtful, it's careful, it's fact-based. Mine certainly was.

Mike Pompeo (31:24):

We began to develop the back pattern, oh goodness, a year and a half out where we could begin to see clearly what was taking place in western China. Talking about things that remind us of what was happening in Europe in the 1930s. The scale is unimaginable. A million people held in things that are akin to concentration camps, forced sterilizations and abortions, people who are disconnected from their families and never permitted to talk to them again, re-education camps. We know these things. History teaches about these things. The intention is to bring in Han Chinese to the west and stamp out the Uyghurs, the mostly Turkic muslim populations there.

Mike Pompeo (32:10):

So it was really important that the United States lead and that the world begin to stand up against this genocidal behavior. The fact that there's still connectivity there, that we have companies that are doing business in this place and supporting this government that is so tragically tyrannical and authoritarian and denying these most fundamental rights to these simple people who simply want to live their lives. The fact that we're going to likely hold an Olympics inside of China, a genocide Olympics inside of China in just a handful of months should shock the conscience of every person around the world.

Fred Fleitz (32:46):

Mr. Secretary, you led a battle for the Trump Administration against the propaganda by the Chinese Communist Party that tried to deflect responsibility from its criminal negligence that allowed the coronavirus to become a deadly worldwide pandemic. I imagine this is one of many reasons why the Chinese government doesn't like you, but I'd like to hear your thoughts on what you did in that regard and where do we stand right now in terms of holding Beijing accountable for what it did to the world with this deadly virus?

Mike Pompeo (33:20):

Fred, it became apparent early on, so January, February of 2020, that the Chinese Communist Party had gone full Chernobyl. That is they were not going to let anybody have access to any information, any data. They were going to cover this thing up. They were going to use their propaganda tools. At one point you'll recall, they tried to blame the United States for having brought the virus upon the world. This was the classic disinformation campaign voiced upon the world.

Mike Pompeo (33:52):

We tried. The CDC tried. HHS tried. The State Department through our ambassador tried to get access to this information and we were shut out, and doctors disappeared, journalists were taken off the map. This was full lockdown information mode by the Chinese Communist Party.

Mike Pompeo (34:09):

Well, in spite of that, what have we learned? In the spring or maybe it was early summer of last year, I suggested that the virus likely came from the Wuhan Institute of Virology. I was mocked a bit. Certainly when in the medical meeting came to my support, the Chinese had a lock hold on this thing, a stranglehold on the information saying, "Oh, this came from a wet market, this virus couldn't have been man-made or manipulated." Well, none of those statements are true for sure.

Mike Pompeo (34:40):

And while I can't prove where it came from, I can tell you that the overwhelming amount of circumstantial evidence suggests that the Chinese were working on this virus in their laboratory, that the laboratory was unsafe,

that the laboratory actors whether they were doctors or technicians were conducting a set of activities that made the virus more human to human spreadable and likely more lethal as well, and then somehow it likely got out of that laboratory.

Mike Pompeo (35:13):

I hope I'm wrong, but they're reckless. You use the term criminal negligence. Their reckless behavior in terms of covering up where patient zero came from or where this virus actually began, it began inside of Wuhan, suggests that there's something that they do not want the world to know. I hope one day they will prove that I am wrong and that they will demonstrate to the world that patient zero wasn't something that came from inside of a Chinese bio facility in Wuhan, China.

Fred Fleitz (35:44):

I want to ask one final question about North Korea. I've had the privilege of discussing this with President Trump. He considers his personal diplomacy with Kim Jong-Un a great success that brought stability to the Korean peninsula. We all agree he didn't achieve everything he wanted to achieve, but he significantly lowered tensions. There's been no nuclear tests since 2017. What's your opinion looking at that now, the President's personal diplomacy with Kim Jong-Un?

Mike Pompeo (36:13):

Yeah. Look, I think the President's got that part right. I remember when we came in, and President talks about how President Obama told him this would be his biggest problem. It was certainly foremost on our minds. When I became CIA Director, I immediately stood up, a mission center aimed at assisting the President having the right fact set associated with the Korea challenge, not just North Korea but all the players around, and how we might ultimately get the North Koreans to make the decision to give up their entire nuclear weapons program in a verifiable way.

Mike Pompeo (36:43):

We didn't get there, but the President's willingness, his willingness to meet with Chairman Kim gave me the opportunity to travel there first as CIA Director, and then as Secretary of State to meet with Chairman Kim and his most trusted advisors to begin to flesh out the range of possibilities.

Mike Pompeo (37:00):

We were hopeful. We were hopeful that following Singapore where Chairman Kim made the commitment to denuclearize that we could put a path forward where we could achieve that in a way that never put the world at risk. And ultimately after Singapore, we went to Hanoi. We weren't successful. Chairman Kim decided ultimately not to give up his nuclear program, but he did reconfirm his commitment not to conduct nuclear tests, he reconfirmed his commitment not to conduct long-range missile tests. That matters a lot to us here in the United States. Those

were good outcomes, albeit partial outcomes.

Mike Pompeo (37:33):

I hope this administration won't lose focus. This is still a dangerous nation, a nation with a capable nuclear program and one that has not yet decided it wants to be part of the community of nations. There's still more work to do.

Fred Fleitz (37:47):

I completely agree. Mr. Secretary, I would love to ask you more questions myself, but I want to open it up to questions from our audience. So I'm going to invite my colleague, Adam Savit, to come back on screen. So Adam, do you have any questions?

Adam Savit (38:01):

We sure do. There's a couple questions about Turkey in the region and specifically given Erdogan's long-term goals. Can we count on him to stay out of this conflict as far as materiel or missile defense support?

Mike Pompeo (38:15):

Oh goodness, no. I don't think we can. There's a history of President Erdogan playing footsie with bad guys. The animosity between he, or I shouldn't personalize, between Turkey and Israel is well-known. I hope that President Erdogan and Prime Minister Netanyahu will have conversations. This is a NATO partner. We shouldn't forget. And I hope that Turks decide that getting involved in this conflict, getting involved in the side that would put more Israeli lives at risk is a bad idea for Turkey. I hope that our ambassador there in turkey and our leadership team in the State Department is making that very clear to the President of Turkey.

Adam Savit (38:57):

A lot was made in the press about Israel's destruction of an empty office building in Gaza. The AP claims they didn't know that they shared office space with Hamas. Do you think this claim is credible?

Mike Pompeo (39:10):

It seems incredulous that if there were Hamas members operating on this building, that the other tenants of the building wouldn't know. I'm happy to see how the data set and the facts all get sorted out, but it shouldn't surprise anyone if it turns out that Hamas was using these journalists as human shields. This is a well-known tactic of the terrorists in the Gaza Strip. They'll hide their weapon systems next to civilian buildings. They'll hide them inside of hospitals.

Mike Pompeo (39:40):

Look, we've seen this before in the Middle East too where they'd use mosques to fire and hide weapons, to hide weapons and fire weapons from, knowing that there were two good outcomes. One, that the Israelis or in that case the Americans wouldn't fire on them. That'd be good. Or the second, they would fire on them and then they could show the video of Israel taking out civilians. This is a violation of the laws of war. This is a massive humanitarian action that is inconsistent with basic morality.

Mike Pompeo (40:12):

We know Hamas has engaged in this before. It won't surprise me at all is when all the facts are known, is that Hamas was operating right alongside journalists inside of that building, and we'll let those journalists explain how they didn't know that they were engaged or sitting next to a bunch of terrorists.

Mike Pompeo (40:28):

I guess the last thing I'd add is you can see the difference here too. When I hear these two, Hamas and Israel compared, it breaks my heart because the Israelis warned before their strike. I'd ask you how many warnings Israeli civilians have received before a rocket landed in Tel Aviv or Ashkelon or Jerusalem.

Adam Savit (40:51):

The iron dome system has proven to be incredibly effective. What's happening with the longer distance anti-missile systems that Israel was working on to defend against Iran?

Mike Pompeo (41:01):

I don't want to say much other than this is a project that's very important. Air defense systems matter an awful lot to countries all throughout the region. We worked hard with our Saudi friends to make sure they had patriot air batteries that could or air defense systems that could defend themselves from Iranian missile strikes. It is important that these nations have the capability to at least take down most of those missiles when those strikes happen. They have an important deterrence component to them. I'm confident the Israelis will ultimately get this right.

Mike Pompeo (41:32):

The last thing I'll say that's important, it's also the case that there are supply issues that need to be maintained. That is for iron dome to continue to be successful, we need to make sure that they have all of the systems, all of the components, all of the materials they need to make sure that iron dome can continue to operate against this massive barrage of rockets that are coming from Gaza. I hope that the United States and Israel's allies and friends will continue to supply that equipment and that material.

Adam Savit (42:03):

There are many people and organizations in the west that work closely with the CCP and have undermined democracy such as free speech and human rights. How can we or should we be calling these people out as much as we call out the CCP itself?

Mike Pompeo (42:17):

Well, in the first instance the Chinese Communist Party must be accountable for the things they do. They are the first order bad guys, just as you know, I wish the Biden Administration took a different approach with respect to Hamas. In the end it's Hamas and the Palestinian Islamic jihad that should be held accountable for this. But we did this in the Trump Administration. We not only called them out for doing business in Xinjiang. We then implemented governmental actions that supported them withdrawing. So we put items on the export list so that they couldn't come out of Xinjiang. We sanctioned politburo members that were engaged in the bad behavior that was connected to genocide or connected to the malfeasance that took place in Hong Kong. So there's a set of government actions that are needed before we begin to call out private sector actors.

Mike Pompeo (43:05):

But we should never shy away from this. I've talked about this with respect to the Olympics. Think about this. If you're a network television station going to send journalists to broadcast the Olympics from China in 2022 and your journalists decide they want to say something about Xi Jinping that is not lovely and positive, what's the chance that they get to come home to their family? Should you put your journalists in a place where you know that they've been canceled, silenced, or prohibited from speaking in a way that reflects the truth of what you will likely see on the ground when you go there, unless your reminder keeps you away from it? These are important questions that we should ask to every commercial entity that's engaged in these kinds of businesses. Do you want to be part of the silencing machine of that surveillance state, of that genocidal regime? I think most business leaders would say, "No, thanks. We'll figure out another way to make money."

Adam Savit (44:05):

There's a question referencing Egypt's position, and that they have a border with the Gaza Strip and what's their responsibility. And in the past there's been some proposals that Egypt might even take responsibility over the Gaza Strip. Is any of that viable?

Mike Pompeo (44:18):

Ah, it's been talked about. It's kind of like a unicorn. It's often talked about, seldom seen. The Egyptians have been a force for good. However, they have worked to previously negotiate ceasefires to get the violence to be reduced. That's always a good thing. I always thought President Sisi understood that violence from the Gaza Strip didn't make any sense, it didn't make any sense for his country wholly apart from the fact that it was an act of war against the state of Israel. I hope President Sisi will continue to use all the tools that he has to influence and

convince these terrorists they should cease their violent behavior.

Adam Savit (44:59):

If we formally rejoin the JCPOA, what will the short-term and long-term fallout be?

Mike Pompeo (45:06):

Well, the first term is you'll have some rich German companies and some wealthy Frenchmen and some dead people in the Middle East. Those are the short-term implications. There'll be more terror, there'll be more risk. The assassination campaigns that the Iranians run will only profligate. Our position in Iraq, our embassy in Iraq will come under increased threat because there'll be more capacity to pay more knuckleheads to participate in Shia violence inside of Iraq itself. It'll be a less independent sovereign state.

Mike Pompeo (45:41):

Those are the those are the short-term implications of restoring the JCPOA. There'll be some great cocktail parties at the United Nations. I'm sure that'll be fun. I'm sure Brussels will be happy. Those are the short-term. Because the long-term implications, you will underwrite a regime that continues to talk about fomenting violence against the Jewish people and will continue its way towards developing the tools and capabilities to ultimately have a nuclear weapons program.

Mike Pompeo (46:10):

And if you think Iran is coercive today, if you think they have the ability to threaten and cajole Israel or Arab states to conform to the way they'd like them to conform, or you think they can undermine Iraq today, wait until they're on the cusp of having a nuclear weapon. This will only increase their coercive capability and their power. It will create further instability all throughout the Middle East.

Mike Pompeo (46:34):

And if you're ... I don't want to mention a country, but if you're another Arab state and you're thinking your way through your own nuclear program and you are being asked to sign up for a gold standard non-proliferation arrangement so that we're comfortable with you having enrichment inside of your own country or having a peaceful nuclear weapons program, mightn't you just ask for the JCPOA? Might you not just say, "I want the deal y'all gave the Iranians."

Mike Pompeo (47:03):

The risk of proliferation in the Middle East is real, it is serious, and rejoining the JCPOA will drive more nation states inside the Middle East to themselves want to have the capacity to build out enrichment capabilities inside of their own country to protect themselves from the Iranian regime.

Fred Fleitz (47:22):

I want to ask a follow-up if I may. Mr. Secretary, there's bipartisan opposition to the Biden Administration moving so fast to rejoin the JCPOA in Congress. It's not most democrats but it's a sizable number. And I'm wondering if there's a chance that they will actually have a significant effect on the Biden Administration to at least slow down their race to rejoin this terrible deal because of the violence that we're seeing right now from the Palestinians which the Iranians are assisting against Israel?

Mike Pompeo (47:56):

Fred, I hope so. I remember when the JCPOA came into effect the first time, there were many democrats who thought it was bad policy. And yet at the end of the day, the whip was cracked and they fell in line. We got something called [inaudible 00:48:09] that was meaningless in preventing the administration from moving down the path of appeasement with respect to Iran.

Mike Pompeo (48:16):

I suspect that at the end of the day, this administration has as an article of faith that rejoining the JCPOA is the right course of action. I don't expect the democrats on Capitol Hill will put any significant pressure on the administration to walk away from that. I hope that I'm wrong.

Adam Savit (48:37):

Do you want to squeeze one more Fred?

Fred Fleitz (48:41):

I think we can squeeze one more and I want to let the Secretary go at 2:30 as you promised.

Adam Savit (48:44):

Sure. So just how can the US deter Chinese aggression vis-a-vis in Taiwan?

Mike Pompeo (48:52):

Three simple ideas. Make it very clear that the commitments that we have already signed up for we will continue to honor. Second, deliver on the defensive systems that have been committed to them. Actually put that hardware on the ground with real capabilities and the support systems needed for the Taiwanese to defend themselves. And then third, make clear to the Chinese Communist Party that the United States is serious about keeping the East China Sea and the South China Sea, and indeed the entire Indo-Pacific region open for commerce. That certainly includes the areas in and around Taiwan, and that there will be an enormous cost imposed on the Chinese Communist Party itself if they should ever seek to close that off.

Mike Pompeo (49:39):

Those three ideas form a central framework along with good leadership inside of Taiwan that can support the Taiwanese people to continue to be this democracy that sits astride the eastern seaboard of China.

Fred Fleitz (49:56):

Secretary Pompeo, thank you so much for your service.

Mike Pompeo (49:59):

Fred, David, Adam, thank you all.

Fred Fleitz (50:02):

And for participating in this webinar. And David Wurmser, thank you for joining me today. And I'd like to thank all our viewers for joining us. I hope you'll tune in to our next webinar and I'm going to let my colleague Adam close.

Adam Savit (50:16):

Yep, so our next one is next Wednesday, the 26th. Putin's policies through different sets of eyes with Andrei Illarionov, moderated by our Michael Waller. The next Wednesday, June 16th, I'll be moderating Taiwan Invasion: How Would China Do It featuring senior fellows Stephen Bryen and Grant Newsham. And June 30th, Islamophobia and the War on Free Speech featuring Robert Spencer, moderated by Kyle Shideler.

Adam Savit (50:41):

Well, we enjoyed having you all here today. Remember that important and timely events like this one are only possible because of your generous support. If you enjoy these programs as much as I do, please visit our website, securefreedom.org. In the upper right corner there's a white donate button. You can make an instant contribution by credit card and get information about other methods of giving. Thanks again to our panelists. We'll see you here next Wednesday.



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