

Secretary Michael R. Pompeo With Sean Hannity of The Sean Hannity Show - United States Department of State

QUESTION: Joining us now with reaction, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo. Mr. Secretary, I said this last night and my reporting has been confirmed. This was an amazing – our Intelligence Community working with the best military on the face of the Earth, the best intelligence forces, your State Department, and the President made this decision very quickly in response to what was a real threat. What can you tell us?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Well, Sean, it's great to be with you. It, in fact, was a all-of-government effort directed and led by President Trump. We identified a risk. The President talked about today that Soleimani, the terrorist, was engaged in active plotting. There was an attack that was imminent that could have killed dozens or hundreds of Americans. We found an opportunity and we delivered. We brought all of America's best and brightest together, found an opportunity, and took this guy who you described pretty accurately as one of the worst terrorists ever to walk the face of the planet, we took him off the battlefield. We were successful at eliminating the risk that he would ever conduct a terror campaign anywhere in the world again or that he could put any American at risk one more time.

QUESTION: Mr. Secretary, the President said earlier today Soleimani was plotting imminent, sinister attacks on American diplomats and military personnel, but we caught him in the act and terminated him. We know the U.S. Special Representative for Iran Brian Hook also confirmed that. I was listening very closely to your comments yesterday, and I felt you were saying the same thing. How bad was this potential?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Yeah, we caught him and we stopped him, and it's a good thing for the world. He was traveling the region when he landed in Baghdad. The travels before that put him in places all around the region which were aimed solely at building out what they were referring to as "the big attack." They were aiming to take down significant amounts of Americans. It would have undoubtedly killed locals too – Iraqis, Lebanese, Syrians perhaps, people all throughout the region. This was an attack that would have been at some scale. We can't talk much about the details but suffice it to say the American people can know that the decision that President Trump made to take Qasem Soleimani down saved American lives.

QUESTION: I've said for years on this program that Prime Minister Netanyahu of Israel was kind of the lone voice of moral clarity identifying the Iranian threat. I wouldn't have imagined five years ago – I would have said impossible probably – that we would now have a situation as we do today – you're partly responsible for this – where the U.S. has aligned with Israel, the Jordanians, the Egyptians, the Emirates, and the Saudis against Iranian hegemony. And from what I understand, my sources tell me the intelligence sharing, it's all-hands-on-deck against Iran.

SECRETARY POMPEO: Yes, Sean, that's absolutely true. One of the things I've heard today from some who have criticized President Trump, which I find odd, but

the criticism has been wait, there's no strategy. That's willful blindness. There's been a deep strategy that President Trump laid down now, goodness, almost three years ago. We've been delivering against that strategy. And to your point, a central part of that is building out a coalition – the Saudis, the Emiratis, all the partners in the Gulf, the Israelis – all working together who recognize that the Islamic Republic of Iran is the problem in the region, not the others.

We're not going to appease any longer. We're going to take on this challenge. And while the President made very clear we don't want war – that wasn't the aim; it wasn't the goal of the strike that we took or the strike that we took in response to the death of an American contractor on December 27th. The goal was not to start a war. Indeed, it was to stop it. President Trump has made equally clear that when American lives are at risk he will act quickly, he will act decisively. We will act to disrupt, and we will hope that that leads to deterrence as well.

QUESTION: Knowing you as well as I do and knowing the time differences with that part of the world, I would imagine you probably didn't go to sleep last night, and you probably spent a lot of time on the phone talking with every country in the region and probably others. Can you give us some insight into what both allied countries and others might be telling you after the killing of Soleimani?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Yeah. Look, these were a couple of long days, but not as long for me as they were for our diplomats on the ground in the region, in Baghdad and in other places. They've done great work alongside our Department of Defense brothers and sisters. It's been truly remarkable. So any amount of work I was doing paled in comparison to the sacrifices they're making.

I did. I spent the last day and a half, two days, talking to partners in the region, sharing with them what we were doing, why we were doing it, seeking their assistance. They've all been fantastic. And then talking to our partners in other places that haven't been quite as good; frankly, the Europeans haven't been as helpful as I wish that they could be. The Brits, the French, the Germans all need to understand that what we did, what the Americans did, saved lives in Europe as well. Qasem Soleimani led and his IRGC led assassination campaigns in Europe. This was a good thing for the entire world, and we are urging everyone in the world to get behind what the United States is trying to do to get the Islamic Republic of Iran to simply behave like a normal nation.

QUESTION: Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, great job. The world is safer today, and thanks for being with us tonight.

SECRETARY POMPEO: Yes, sir. Thank you, Sean.