



Counterbalance: Ep. 6: Mike Pompeo on China, Iran, and the Future of American Foreign Policy

TRANSCRIPT

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- Michael R. Pompeo, *Distinguished Fellow, Hudson Institute*
- Michael Doran, *Senior Fellow, Hudson Institute*
- Marshall Kosloff, *Media Fellow*

A video of the event is available: <https://www.hudson.org/research/preview/16812-counterbalance-ep-6-mike-pompeo-on-china-iran-and-the-future-of-american-foreign-policy>

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Marshall Kosloff:

I'm Marshall Kosloff.

Mike Doran:

And I'm Mike Doran.

Marshall Kosloff:

Welcome back to Counterbalance. Today's guest literally requires no introduction. It's former Secretary of State, Mike Pompeo. He recently joined the Hudson Institute as a distinguished fellow. It was great for Mike and I to have the chance to speak with him for actually a significant amount of time, actually on the Realignment, Saagar and I spoke to Secretary Pompeo when we were at Hudson, but it was only for 20 minutes. We actually got much more time to speak with him. And we just got into all these different, interesting topics, everything from his perspective on leadership, starting as a second Lieutenant, right out of West Point during the Cold War in West Germany, to his time as director of the Central Intelligence Agency to his tenure as Secretary of State. So a lot of really great things that I thought were really valuable.

Mike Doran:

You know what I really enjoyed, I really enjoyed the fact that we had this conversation in person. It's the only one other than our conversation with Mike Gallagher that we did face-to-face. You can just tell so much more about a person when you're in the room with them than you can over a Zoom conversation. The thing that really struck me was the passion that he had about certain issues. And in particular, the Iran question, which is the one that I care the most about. I could just tell that when he was talking about Iran and he was rattling off all of the issues, that these were really heartfelt positions that he had. Not just a politician running through the basis, I really enjoyed that. I won't talk any more about it. Let's just get into this episode.

Marshall Kosloff:

Yeah. Like we said, this is really great. He reveals a lot about his perspective, his world view and how that shaped by many things, including his approach to faith, which I thought was really great as well too. Of course a huge thank you to the Hudson Institute for supporting our work. Let's dive into the episode.

Mike Doran:

Secretary Pompeo, the New York Times recently published an article saying that you have broken a genteel custom of giving your successor time and space to develop his policies. You in contrast to apparently all previous secretaries of state are being excessively partisan. I wonder if you have any reaction to that claim?

Secretary Mike Pompeo:

Darnedest thing, I had this sent to me from friends all across the world asking me what on earth the New York Times was writing about reminding me of what previous secretaries had done. In the end, New York Times can write what they're going to write. I have a responsibility to continue to make the case for the things that matter to America and the things that I believe deeply in. I'll do that. I'll do it in a polite way. I wish this administration enormous amount of success. That success would often look like the things that we were working on when we were serving. And I hope that they'll continue to follow

many of them. We didn't get everything right every day, but we had a lot of things I think were right, and I want to make sure that the world and the American people understand that.

Marshall Kosloff:

What's the number one thing, speaking of the areas you're concerned about right now that you're focused on right now, either in the criticism or in your perspective in everything?

Secretary Mike Pompeo:

It's not a close call actually. Far and away is the threat that the Chinese communist party poses to each of us and to the United States and to our friends and allies around the world. I hope this will prove to be a bipartisan policy that President Trump began us on the path to pushing back against them. I've seen places where it is, places where I'm very concerned, but in the end of the day, we must get that piece right.

Mike Doran:

When you look at the debate on China now, I think the Trump administration, and especially the state department under you led a kind of sea change in the attitude toward China and putting the competition with China front and center in everyone's mind. In my view, you guys actually changed the opinion of the American people. When you look at this, do you think that that change is now permanent? Or do you think that the Biden administration is trying to move back to the grooves of the old policy?

Secretary Mike Pompeo:

Well, we did make change. It was neither enough nor is there ever any guarantee of permanency. That's absolutely true. I remind myself all the time that anytime you've got a problem, 12 step program. First thing you have to do is acknowledge that you have a problem and we had a problem. And so I spent my first year in change, Secretary of State, identifying for the world and for the American people.

And I've traveled inside the United States telling this story, identifying the scope and scale and nature of the threat that is posed. Not to be an alarmist, not to send people over the wall, but rather to just ... All the clarity that we could muster from the intelligence community and from the things we observed about the challenges that the Chinese Communist Party presented.

And their goodness was in the sense of while we were making this case, the Chinese communist party was fulfilling the various things that they had told us that they would do about undermining our republic, issues with a totalitarian regime's response to a virus that emerged from their country. All of those things I think came together. I do believe the American people have a deeper understanding of the problems that China poses to us. I am hopeful that they will continue to take this seriously. And then one day I'm hopeful the Chinese Communist Party will change its behavior. That's a lot further off.

Marshall Kosloff:

I want to go back for a second to your point about there are some things the Biden administration is doing that you're happy with, there are others you're less happy with. Can you just take away what both things are?

Secretary Mike Pompeo:

Sure. So I'll give you an example. The other day they sanctioned senior Chinese leaders for the broken promises with respect to Hong Kong. That's the right thing to do. I proposed, with respect to China, distrust and verify. And when they make a promise, we shouldn't take their word for it, we should force them to deliver. In Hong Kong, they have failed to do that. They broke a 50 year promise at the halfway point, essentially, and now have a fundamentally undermined the freedom of the people they committed to continue to allow to have a semi-autonomous existence in Hong Kong. The administration took action, real honest cost impose on the Chinese leadership for that decision. Those are the kinds of things they hope they'll continue to do.

Marshall Kosloff:

And what about the things that they are doing or trending towards that you are concerned about?

Secretary Mike Pompeo:

Well, they've been back and forth in their rhetoric with respect to China. And what's really important is that one not outstrip its headlights in terms of speed. If you're going to say something, you have to deliver. The worst thing you can do in foreign policy is make a promise and then fail to deliver. We saw that in Syria with President Obama. We've seen this time and time throughout the course of history. Roosevelt talked about walk softly and carry a big stick. These folks are talking awful loudly on a few fronts, and I hope they're prepared to deliver.

You know the place they've made the most radical turn today is in the Middle East. We fundamentally appended 40 years of establishment Middle East policy. They appear to be reverting to at least the norm that they'd created in the eight years of President Obama, where the center point of the effort is with respect to Iran and trying to engage with Iran. We went a different direction. I think that's an enormously risky mistake.

Mike Doran:

I think there's a connection between the, as I see it, between the China question and the Iran question, especially now we have-

Secretary Mike Pompeo:

A lot of clarity on that this past week.

Mike Doran:

Yeah. With the pact between China and Iran. I wonder if you have any reaction to that about how you understood the relationship between China and Iran and how you think the Biden administration is understanding that.

Secretary Mike Pompeo:

Well, Mike, you've known this too. I think you've written about this, China's intentions in the Middle didn't just begin with this deal with Iran this past week. They're broad. They are deep. By the way, extents to Israel and to the Gulf Arab States in addition to Iran. That influence, that capacity to determine outcomes in the Middle East is important to the Chinese. They are resource dependent for petroleum products and fossil fuels. It is with great intention that they have esconce themselves inside of the commercial apparatuses and governmental apparatuses in those countries as well.

Look, the most recent manifestation this past week was this deal between China and Iran. We could spend time on that if you'd like. In the end, it was very clear to me, whether it was ports near the Indian ocean or work around the Strait of Hormuz or even further North up in the Suez, we watched the Chinese working to have geostrategic capability to impact the flow of product transportation goods all around the region, so that when the moment came, they'd have the capacity to make sure that they got the things that they needed and that others might not get the things that they very much needed.

Mike Doran:

Would you call it an alliance between China and Iran? An alignment? Do you see Iran as instrument or do you have a different picture of that?

Secretary Mike Pompeo:

So as a mutual admiration society, these are two regimes that don't give a whip stitch for the rights of their own people that aren't about to allow individuals to practice faith, all the things that we value and love in a democratic society. So they have an alignment with respect to how they treat their people. They have an alignment with respect to how they think about the world in an instrumentalist way. That is, what do you use your power for? You use the power to protect the regime. And so these are both totalitarian systems. Interestingly, one deeply a religious, the other deeply theocratic. So there's a divergence there, but then they have commercial overlap and military and geostrategic overlap as well. Both see the United States as a central threat to who they are and their existence in power.

Second, they have a capacity for trading things that are important to them. The Iranians have oil and access to petroleum products. The Chinese have a desperate need for that. They're dependent on the world for 75 to 80% of their petroleum resources. They're a growing country with 1.4 billion people that need access to that product and then the Chinese have money and technology and indeed high-end complex weapons systems and a cyber capability that is very, very good and compliments Iran's in a deep way. There's lots of things for them to trade back and forth, that's why my team, Brian Hook and I with our Iran sanctions program focused very, very diligently on making sure that the Iran China connection was severed to the maximum extent possible.

We had enormous success. It was starting to be eroded just at the end because the Iranians could see that there was likely to be a new sheriff in town, a new president of the United States, it began to erode at the end, but the arms embargo that was in place, this was a result of the JCP, was a five-year deal. Prevented the Iranians from buying and selling weapons systems. That expired in the fall of 2020. It's why I took the action to engage in Snapback at the United Nations and then to watch this administration walk in and just say, that's no longer US policy. Essentially green-lighting Chinese and Iranian arm sales. When I say arms, we often think of tanks and missiles. That's a component of this, but we're talking about semiconductors and cyber tools and all of the elements of kinetic and non-kinetic activity. This is a really high risk proposition to allow them to engage in that trade and the fact that this administration has now green-lighted that is truly risky for the countries that are affected most by it. The countries in the region. The Israelis and the Saudis, Emirates, the Jordanians and the Kuwaitis, but also for Europe and the United States.

Marshall Kosloff:

Something that comes to mind in the Iranian and Chinese cases, this debate, especially during the Obama years, is there a balance between engagement with the regime? Is there a need to contain to be more aggressive? How do you think about that framing? Typically when the Obama administration approached these issues, they would say, look, we're engaging. Engagement is how you prevent conflict.

Engagement is how you prevent escalation. While there's also a portrayal of the Trump administration as being more focused on more containment. How do you think about that dynamic?

Secretary Mike Pompeo:

We met with Chairman Kim. I'm all about engagement when you believe there's an outcome that you can deliver, but when you determine that you can't, when you can see that the arrangement is not going to be satisfactory for America, that engagement no longer adds value. You can still talk, you can still have communications, you can exchange beautiful diplomatic notes, but at the end of the day, the Iranians respect power and they love appeasement and they will drive a truck through a weakness.

What they clearly came to see back in '13, '14, '15, when these negotiations were taking place, is they could roll the administration. The administration desperately wanted this deal and you can see how desperate they want it by the actions that the administration formers took when we walked away from that crappy deal. I think the Iranians know that. Look at this, the administration comes in and says, we want to go back on the deal, the Iranians say, what are you talking about? Go back to the JCPOA, which by the way, has provisions that are expiring, even already expired and are expiring even as we speak. The Iranians would love to go back on the deal, but they're not willing to pay a penny for it at this point. I think the Iranians know that if they continue to hold out, we will continue to shower them with flowers and worse, most importantly, money.

Marshall Kosloff:

What's interesting here is the potential seesawing between administration when it comes to big foreign policy questions. Obviously we can overindulge in cold war era cliches, but there was something to the idea that there was this broad bipartisan consensus, which policy operated in between. There could be swings to the left, swings to the right, but there was a broad structure. Do you have any concerns about, as these issues polarize, there just being this inconsistent policy between administrations just consistently switching off. We're soft on Iran. We're hard on Iran and back and forth across the board?

Secretary Mike Pompeo:

It's one of the glorious things about democracy, is that the American people get to choose who their leaders are and their leaders have responsibility to take the actions that make sense for them. The world sees that there are differences in views. You should note, there are scores and scores of democrats who think that JCPOA was just ludicrous and they were rolled. They were rolled by president Obama into supporting it. The bipartisan consensus on Iran isn't that we should appease them. There's brought bipartisan consensus that know this is a rogue nation, engaged in assassination campaigns in Europe and terror campaigns across the middle east and now engaged with the Chinese Communist Party, the most existential threat to United States of America. There is bipartisan support on that. The question is what actions one ought to take and I am confident of this much.

I think the administration is now allowed some billion dollars, maybe it's \$2 billion to flow to the Iranian regime. Monies that were sitting in different places, but that had been frozen and that our administration had diligently made sure didn't end up in the hands of the Ayatollah. They're now going to let that move forward. Watch where the money goes. We should see how much of that goes to social welfare programs in Isfahan. We should go take a look and see how much of this goes to support the World Health Organization. We should take a look and see if these are really good citizens providing blue hat helmet people for the United Nations. This money is going to go Hezbollah. This money is going to go to the militias in Iraq. This money is going to go to the pockets of the leadership inside of Iran and be put in accounts all across the world so the United States can't get access to it.

This is just common sense. This isn't about party or politics. This is about common sense and I think the world knows that America ultimately lands on common sense and so they can see these differences between administrations. They'll respond accordingly and I think what you saw and see happening with the Abraham Accords, is deeply connected to a central understanding that the Trump administration had this set of policies broadly speaking about the middle east in a place that was good for their own people.

Mike Doran:

Do you think the Biden administration is trying to destroy the Abraham Accords?

Secretary Mike Pompeo:

No. I don't think they are. I take them at their word that they are going to try and build on the Abraham Accords, but separate from that, the Abraham Accords are going to continue. The Abraham Accords took place because I think bold leaders in the middle east recognized the hatred of Israel as a foundational principle of your foreign policy doesn't make sense in 2020. I think they came to understand that they were better off having a relationship, a diplomatic relationship, an intelligence and military relationship, an important economic relationship, with Israel and they came to see that they could do that. They had the freedom to make that decision and I think the people in those countries will come to see that their lives are better as a result of that in the end. I think that will drive them to continue to expand on these agreements.

I think this current administration probably believes those are good things too. They have said as much. I hope so. I hope they'll continue to work to build on them. The risk is not that they will intentionally seek to undermine them, but that their dalliances with the Ayatollah and with the Iranians will no longer provide the American support to the central tenants that allowed these leaders in the Gulf states to make the decision with respect to Israel. While these were bold decisions by Arab leaders and by Prime Minister Netanyahu as well, it took an America who was prepared to help facilitate and make it work and to make it clear we would help defend them from the threats that the regime in Iran posed. As we back away from that, I think those leaders will be less likely to be bold in how they continue to advance this and I regret that very much. I regret it for American security, but I mostly regret it for peace and stability in the middle east and better lives for people all across the middle east and that includes in the West Bank and in Iran.

I think the foundational ideas of the Abraham accord stretch across the entirety of the middle east and I hope one day it'll extend to everywhere in that region.

Marshall Kosloff:

Let's pivot bit to your time in the Trump administration. There was a recent event with Roger Hertog where you specifically talked about how you built a strong relationship with President Trump during your time as CIA director and that then carried over to your time as Secretary of State. Can you just expand and just talk about some of the insights from that?

Secretary Mike Pompeo:

I think for the administration, I know for me, it was enormously valuable that I had the chance to spend a year and a half being the person who briefed the president almost every day with the intelligence because I had a chance to observe how he absorbed information and the chance to watch how he thought about problem sets around the world. I knew the importance he placed on America's economic capability and America's economic power. I had this foundational set of understandings between myself

and the president about how he operated. He was the president of the United States. He is the primary decision maker on how the world order will continue to advance and so I had that optic, that chance to see him. When I became secretary of state, I knew how he absorbed information and how he thought through problem sets and that was an enormous advantage I think for me and for the State Department to have that relationship. I've never forgotten what former Secretary of State Jim Baker told me. I was the nominee to be secretary of state. I asked him if he had spent some time, he came out and spent four or five hours with me. And he said, "You know Mike, the most important thing you do is that you have a relationship with the president. You always maintain that relationship. If the world sees that there is a disconnect there, you're just some guy traveling around the world on vacation."

So it was the right thing for the world, for America's secretary of state to have that deep connectivity. And to understand that as I traveled, I needed to be speaking on behalf of the president of the United States. So hard conversations in private, debates and policy in private, decisions made by the president, execution in public by the secretary of state. I never forgot that. I hope no secretary of state ever forgets that.

Mike Doran:

Is that your core advice? If somebody came to you who was a nominee to be secretary of state and said, what do I need to know? Is that the essence of the advice that you would give or are there other things that you would say to them?

Secretary Mike Pompeo:

It's certainly central. I mean, our constitution grants this enormous power to the president of the United States to conduct American foreign policy. Frustrated me sometimes when I was a member of Congress. But the president is paramount in this space and his secretary of state is his primary thought provider, policy development expert to deliver a set of options, to deliver to execute against the mission set that the president sets forward. The president's then the decision maker. And so his secretary of state, or if there's a woman president, her secretary of state needs to know that that person is out there working on behalf of the policies that the president speaks to. World leaders can sniff this out in a second. If you're out there freelance, and if you're out engaged in activity that doesn't match what the commander in chief's intent is, they will smoke it out and they will see it. And the American bureaucracy will smell it too and you simply can't permit that to happen.

So I was diligent in straightforwardly delivering President Trump's policy around the world each and every day. I pushed back where I needed to, but I did that when it was he and I and the team.

Marshall Kosloff:

You've repeatedly emphasized the word private in terms of those interactions. If we're thinking of this from an advice perspective, how would you advise future administration appointees, officials, et cetera, really approach the really skewed incentive system in DC right now, which is operate in public, leak, that part of it, use the media as a form of advocacy because you're describing something which I understand long term was, frankly, separate from good governance, just like a good strategic move, but short term may have caused there to be situations where you didn't get your way on things.

Secretary Mike Pompeo:

Yeah, you're referring to the noble bureaucratic tool of lose and leak. You lose a policy debate. You call the Wall Street Journal and the Washington Post and you leak your side of the story so you can put pressure on someone. I saw it happen to me scores of times. I saw it happen for me inside the State

Department. I saw it happen to me inside the National Security Council where there was a particular debate that someone hadn't gotten the policy decision that they were looking for and they thought, "Boy, I can apply pressure." That is evil. It is also, in my judgment, unlawful. I hope future justice departments will prosecute people for exactly this activity. You have no right.

When you're an American government official, you have a constitutional duty. You raise your right hand. This is really straightforward for me. Maybe it's because of my time in the military. I think it's because of my belief in Jesus Christ. I think it's my central understanding of how human beings treat each other and our responsibility in the United States of America that says, "No, you do your job. And your job is not to talk to the Washington Post about sensitive matters. Your job is not to say, 'Geez, I didn't quite get my way on this. And I'm going to go see if I can't get some advocacy group to go tell some story and print some article on wherever it may be, The New York Times, Breitbart, print some story that applies pressure in a way that gets me the outcome that I'm looking for.'" There are lots of people whose job it is to tell those stories and to advocate externally and publicly. It is not people who are on the payroll of the United States government to do that.

Marshall Kosloff:

How do you build a culture where that doesn't happen from a leadership? You're at the CIA or at the State Department. How would you, as a leader, advocate people build cultures where you're focused on your... You do kind of this as an individual, but how does a broader culture like that work?

Secretary Mike Pompeo:

Well, this problems exists from the time I was a tank platoon leader to when I ran operation at Baskin Robbins. There is no [inaudible 00:24:38]. Human nature is, and what you have to do is you have to build out a central cultural understanding. This is difficult because administrations do have just a short time on station. I was Secretary of State for two and a half years. My predecessor was there for less than that. My two predecessors each for four years. You don't have time to do what you can do if you have a longer time horizon. We attempted to do that by creating, we call it the ethos at the state Department. We built out a central understanding. It started out with, "I am an American diplomat," and then it lays down the normative behaviors that each individual would engage in. It is sadly the case this administration has thrown that out the door. I think that's actually very telling.

But go back and read that ethos. It was not partisan. It was actually built up by 700 plus State Department officials who work together to create this culture. And I would remind the team that worked with me, both at state and at CIA, if you can't be trusted to protect the information that you're provided, what foreign counterpart is going to want to share information with you? If you can't be trusted to protect valuable information to what you've been entrusted, who from another agency is going to trust the State Department with the information that they have developed?

They work against the people who have come to the foreign service and dedicated their life to service to America, to serve as American diplomats. It diminishes them. It diminishes them in the eyes of the world. It diminishes them in the eyes of their colleagues. It diminishes them in the eyes of the political people who come around and try and help them be successful for a period of time. It's a culture that we worked hard to try and develop, and we did so only with modest success.

Mike Doran:

When I listened to you talk about foreign policy, I'm struck by the number of references to your faith that come into it. And it's obvious that these are not statements for effect. They just come out just naturally. And so I'm curious what it means to you how your faith influenced your understanding of

foreign policy. Because as secretary of state, foreign policy, a lot of deal making, just pragmatic deal making like a businessman would make deals. You're making deals with people who are not Christians a lot of the time.

Secretary Mike Pompeo:

Yes. Most often indeed. Yes.

Mike Doran:

Yeah. So have you thought about that? Do you have any insights to share about how does your Christian faith influence you in that activity?

Secretary Mike Pompeo:

You know, Mike, I actually gave some remarks about this because I felt it was important because people were writing about this. I do reference who I am. I talk about myself as being Italian. I talk about myself as being a Christian. I want people to know who they're sitting across from. I always found when I ran two small businesses, we could have lawyers draft documents that mattered, get the documents right, we'd negotiate hard and we'd win a few, lose a few. In the end, I really wanted to know who I was going to be dealing with it. If this was a contract on something going forward, people we're going to have to work with or my business dependent upon, the document mattered, but who I was dealing with matter. And I wanted people around the world to know who Mike was. I wanted them to kind of understand how my thinking was almost certain to be applied to a particular problem set, not the one we had in front of us today, but I wanted them to know that.

So I always felt like I should just be wide open about who I am. And for me, my faith is a central part of my understanding of my time on earth, the things that I am asked to do. Anybody who knows me... What's the better way to say it? My wife describes me as authentic Christian in then I get it wrong a lot. It's not the case that I suggest for a moment because of my Christian faith I don't get it wrong or make mistakes. Indeed, I think the Christian faith teaches that we all get it wrong and that we're all sinners and we all make mistakes.

But what it does is it does inform the way I think about my role as a human being in the world, my role as an American citizen in the world, and then my role more narrowly when I was America's secretary of state and the opportunity I had to go around the world and talk about our Judeo-Christian tradition, the understandings we have, things like the golden rule about how you should simply treat other human beings. And for me, the duty to protect every life from conception till natural death, these are central understandings that I have about how humans ought to behave. And it definitely informed what I did.

I was wide open. I gave a speech in Cairo where I began by talking about the fact that I was an evangelical Christian, knowing full well that my audience was filled with people who weren't Christians. But they were disciplined believers, many of them in their own faith and another Abrahamic tradition. And I admire them for that. And I appreciate the fact that they have their faith. And I hope that it informs the way they think about their role and their place in the world as well. And my understanding of their faith and how they think about faith in their life helps me when we're trying to figure out how to make life better for the people that each of us represents, even though we may have an adverse set of interest on a particular topic for one moment.

Mike Doran:

This reminds me, I took a job in the Defense Department. I was a Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense. I didn't serve in the military and I never worked in the Defense Department. And when I took my job, a

guy who was in the defense department came to give me some advice. And he said, "First thing you do when you take over your team is you have to cut somebody's balls off." He said, "Doesn't matter who, doesn't matter why."

Secretary Mike Pompeo:

Can you say that on a podcast?

Marshall Kosloff:

PG-13. Nice.

Mike Doran:

Anyway, you have to knock them down at the knees. And he said, "Doesn't matter who, doesn't matter why, but you just have to show who's boss." And so I said, "Oh, thank you. Yeah, that's great." But I thought, "I'm not going to do that." But then, a couple months later, I was down at MacDill Air Force Base and I was having some beers with some SOCOM generals. These are guys that wake up every morning and they bite the heads off snakes for breakfast, and then kick somebody in the private parts for exercise. So, guys we've actually been in battle and led men and so forth. And I told them that advice, and they literally fell off their chairs laughing.

And they said, "It's ingrained in you in Officer Training School. This is not the way you lead." And he said, "You have to understand, to lead men in battle, there has to be discipline, so somebody has to be the disciplinarian. So the key is, you have to know yourself. If you're not a disciplinarian, don't try to be one, because the men, as you were saying, they suss it out immediately. They can tell you're not a tough guy, trying to be tough. Your XO has to be the tough guy." But then they went on and they said, and I thought about this, this is a big lesson that I learned, that the essence of good strategy, both as an individual and for a country, the first principle is know thyself. If you're trying to be something that you're not and you're not upfront about it, it's going to go badly.

Secretary Mike Pompeo:

You may have said that better than I did. The other thing that this reminds me of too, when you speak about faith, is the obligation to listen. So, I've told this story a couple times. My first assignment as a Second Lieutenant, I was in Germany. I landed in Frankfurt, I rolled out to a little town called Bindlach. I grabbed my gear and my unit was in the field: Bravo Troop, 1st Squadron, 2nd Armored Cavalry Regiment. It was the first platoon at the time. And so I was going to be the Platoon Leader, I was Second Lieutenant, I barely knew where I was. And I roll out there and I meet my Platoon Sergeant, a man named Sergeant First Class Pritri. And I walk up to Sergeant Pritri, bright-eyed and bushy-tailed, and he looks at me. He would have been probably early 40s. And he looks at me and he says, "Lieutenant, you'll do well if you'd just shut up for a while." And I love Sergeant First Class Pritri. He was a great Platoon Sergeant and he was dead right.

What he really meant is, listen, learn, observe; watch how people are behaving, absorb that; be who you are, know who you are, be deeply confident in who you are and who you are as a person, but make sure you're watching how others behave, because if you're going to lead... This was a small unit. I think it was a J-Series platoon. We might've had 30 people at the time, maybe 35, a small unit. We were a team that we had to go build out, and that team needed to know who Lieutenant Pompeo was. And to do that, I needed to listen and understand them, because if we were going to effectively communicate; I was never in combat, but if, in fact, things went badly; we were patrolling the East German border, that was our mission set; if things went badly, we were going to be in trouble in a real instant. And we needed in

that moment to make sure everybody knew who was in charge, and who those leaders were and how they were going to react in the moment.

Marshall Kosloff:

Something I'm curious about within the context of the conversation on your Christian faith is, there's been some really good reporting on this recently, America is really trending in a secular direction in many respects. So how do you think as a leader, you relate the real framing you have of your evangelical faith with the fact that there are an increasing number of Americans who either are just neutral or just don't think about faith in the way that you do?

Secretary Mike Pompeo:

I watch Europe as a model for things that can present risk to a dynamic nation, like the United States of America. There are fewer people who attend worship services in Europe. There are more people who identify as either areligious or disconnected from religion. These are much more secular places. This isn't about Christianity. This is about discipline and faith. This is about people who believe that there's something beyond just this thing you're doing in the moment, who formally understand that there's something bigger than just each of us. And when the people of a nation lose that, history suggests that things don't go well for that part of civilization.

And so, I'm not as pessimistic as you described about the nature of that here in the United States, but I think our faith communities, whether that's people that are Jewish or Muslim or Christian or any faith at all, I hope they will all engage with citizens across America and make the case for why we're not just all little people who come here for a moment and then perish, and there's nothing bigger than that. That's not good. If you go back and look at our founders and you look at how they wrote about faith in the American tradition, this is something that's at the center of the United States, it's what's made us so exceptional. And I'm convinced America will continue to head down that path.

Mike Doran:

Well, I think that's a great note for ending this. Thanks a lot. This has been a very interesting and informative conversation.

Secretary Mike Pompeo:

Good. Thank you all. Thanks for having me on.

Marshall Kosloff:

Yeah, thanks for joining us.

Mike Doran:

Well, that's it for this week. We hope you enjoyed the show. Please remember to rate the show, rate it highly so that it remains the fastest-growing podcast in America. And share it with your friends, your family, and also with your enemies, if they're interested. And we look forward to seeing you next week. On behalf of Marshall and the Hudson Institute, we thank you.