**Transcript of U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo’s address at Voice of America, January 11, 2021**

Remarks also by U.S. Agency for Global Media CEO Michael Pack and VOA Director Robert Reilly

U.S. AGENCY FOR GLOBAL MEDIA CEO MICHAEL PACK: “Hello, and welcome to everyone joining us live, both in person and virtually all over the world. I am Michael Pack, the Chief Executive Officer of the U.S. Agency for Global Media, which is the federal government entity that manages and oversees U.S. civilian international broadcasting. Now unfortunately, as many of you abroad know all too well, there are regimes bent on preventing people from accessing objective news and information. To keep power, they manufacture and propagate false realities, seeking to control thought, and belief, and ultimately action. Let me be clear, this behavior is an affront to the universal right of freedom of expression, a right which every single person is entitled by virtue of being a human being. America has never stood for this form of malevolence, and our nation must now confront it even more vigorously. Indeed, as the adversaries of liberty and democracy double down on producing and distributing disinformation, America must reassert itself in the new global war of ideas. To do that, we need to more robustly promote and explain our principles to the world. Fortunately, since 1942, we have had an excellent platform to do exactly that. That platform, of course, is Voice of America. Today here at the headquarters of Voice of America in Washington DC, we are tremendously honored to host this very special event, featuring the 75th US Secretary of State, Michael R. Pompeo. To further introduce the secretary, I'd like to turn the podium over to the director of the Voice of America, Robert R. Reilly. Thank you and please enjoy the event.”

VOICE OF AMERICA DIRECTOR ROBERT REILLY: “Thank you Michael and for your unstinting support, it's greatly appreciated. Welcome everyone. I want to begin by thanking a few people who work so hard to make this event a success. I begin with Eduardo Kachscovsky, who's the Director of Studio and Production Operations here at VOA, and his very hard-working team who, under the difficulties of the COVID restrictions, worked so hard to get this job done. I want to thank John Lippman, the Deputy Programming Director with his daily meetings for shepherding this all through and pulling it together, and most especially the Deputy VOA director Beth Robbins for all the hard work she has done. Now, it's a pleasure to introduce a man who needs no introduction. I think I can do it with two words. They are ‘renaissance man’. Why? Well briefly – at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, first in his class, a career Army officer, armor officer in West Germany. In an armored cavalry unit, he helped protect Western Europe against what Ronald Reagan had called the evil empire. Now, Ronald Reagan was known for saying some other things. He was very fond of saying there's nothing better for the inside of a man than the outside of a horse. It’s been a long time since we've had horse cavalry, but with a little twisted emphasis on what he said, I've heard that the Secretary is occasionally heard to say life is always better than an M-1 tank. Well, after his military career, Mr. Pompeo went on to Harvard Law School, where he excelled with the Harvard Law Review. After law school, he went to Kansas and began a successful business career. He founded Thayer Aerospace, where he served as CEO for more than a decade. He later became president of Sentry International. From thence, he ran for Congress successfully in the fourth district of Kansas. And even as a freshman Congressman, he had an outsized influence due to the depth of his knowledge on foreign policy and intelligence issues, and his powers of persuasion. He was in his fourth term when the President called upon him to take upon himself the role of the Director of the Central Intelligence Agency, and then in 2018, he was sworn in as the Secretary of State. Now he's done all this while still being, at least from my perspective, still a young man, so we can expect much more from Secretary of State Mike Pompeo. I am so grateful for his honoring VOA with his presence today. Secretary Pompeo.”

UNITED STATES SECRETARY OF STATE MICHAEL POMPEO: “Thank you. Good afternoon, everyone. Thank you for the warm welcome. Michael, thanks for your leadership of this incredibly important institution, and Bob, congratulations on returning to the helm of VOA. I’m truly happy to be here. I’m honored you requested, and it’s always fun to be with a fellow tanker too. I want to acknowledge the other network chief who is with us today – Steve Yates at Radio Free Asia. Steve where you at, nice to see you. And a note of appreciation too, to the Voice of America journalists, staff, and all those watching and listening. I’ve sat down for interviews with many of you in the far corners of the world, they have always been a joy. And speaking of which too, I understand that this speech is being broadcast on TV, radio, on your website, social media, in more than 40 languages. Hats off to the translators. I have no idea how anyone can translate my talking into Uzbek this quickly. That guy or gal deserves a bonus. It’s great to have this opportunity. I’ve been following the work of Voice of America for decades. And as Bob just mentioned, I started my career as an Army officer, patrolling the Iron Curtain – freedom’s frontier – in the 1980s. I couldn’t cross into East Germany, I was serving in a little town called Bindlach. West Germans couldn’t cross either. But your broadcasts, Voice of America broadcasts could. Millions of men and women, whose names we’ll never know, listened to you, often at their own peril. Their governments dealt only in lies, in propaganda. VOA’s listeners wanted the truth. And that’s what you gave them. VOA’s very first broadcast in 1942 that Bob referred to, began with the ‘Battle Hymn of the Republic’ along with this pledge: ‘The news may be good. The news may be bad. But we’ll tell you the truth.’ I love that. I always told my son. I told this story before while he was growing up: ‘Work hard, keep your faith, and tell the truth.’ He mostly followed my advice, and it has served him, and many of you, I know well. Your mandate here at Voice of America is unambiguous – to be ‘accurate, objective, and comprehensive, and to represent America’. The mission of the USAGM is ‘to inform, engage and connect people around the world in support of freedom and democracy.’ That’s because expanding freedom and democracy are what America has always been about. You’re the voice of American exceptionalism, you should be proud of that. The world needs VOA’s clarion call for freedom, now more than ever. I hear it wherever I go. That’s what I wanted to talk about today. I tell audiences about American exceptionalism wherever and whenever I can, because it’s true and because it’s important. America is good and great, and everyone who truly grabs our founding understands this. Michael and Bob have made studying this history their life’s work. Many of you have made it your life’s mission too – that’s why you work here at Voice of America. We were indeed the first nation founded on the central belief that all human beings are endowed with certain unalienable rights, and that governments are instituted to secure those God-given rights. We’ve always striven for a more perfect union, and goodness knows we don’t always get it right. Therefore, we need both pride and humility about our past and our present. We need the truth. But it’s very clear that when Americans have united around our founding values, be it in Philadelphia, at Gettysburg, at Seneca Falls, or during Martin Luther King’s March on Washington, we have made good on our founding promise time and time again. Now our adversaries try and claim otherwise. When the Chinese Communist Party attempted to exploit the tragic death of George Floyd, to claim their authoritarian system was somehow superior to ours, I issued a statement, which read in part: ‘During the best of times, the People’s Republic of China ruthlessly imposes communism. But amid the most difficult challenge, the United States secures freedom.’ There is no moral equivalence. This is a self-evident truth. It is not fake news for you to broadcast that this is the greatest nation in the history of the world and the greatest nation that civilization has ever known. Indeed, I’m not saying this to ignore our faults. Indeed, just the opposite – it is to acknowledge them. But this isn’t the Vice of America, focusing on everything that’s wrong with our great nation, it’s the Voice of America. It certainly isn’t the place to give authoritarian regimes in Beijing or Tehran a platform. Your mission is to promote democracy, freedom, and American values all across the world. A U.S. taxpayer-funded institution aimed squarely at that. Indeed, this is what sets VOA apart from MSNBC and Fox News and the like. You can give voice to the voiceless in dark corners of the world. You’re the voice of American striving. You’re the voice of American exceptionalism. You are indeed the tip of freedom’s spear. Now look, like many government agencies, after the Cold War ended, our international broadcasters, well they lost their way. Many of you know this. And I’m sure there were many reasons. The Soviet Union had collapsed, the Wall had come down. Names like Bin Laden, and Zarqawi, and Baghdadi weren’t widely known. In fact, many wrote that history was over. We allowed security protocols to lapse, and VOA lost its commitment to its founding mission. Its broadcasts had become less about telling the truth about America, and too often about demeaning America. In 2013, one of my predecessors described the Broadcasting Board of Governors as ‘practically defunct.’ Look, that’s in part why Congress created the role of CEO of the USAGM on a bipartisan basis. And it is again why I’m here today. I read that some VOA employees didn’t want me to speak today, I’m sure it was only a handful. They didn’t want the voice of American diplomacy to be broadcast on the Voice of America. Think about that for just a moment. Look, we’re all parts of institutions with duties and responsibilities higher and bigger and more important than any one of us individually. But this kind of censorial instinct is dangerous. It’s morally wrong. Indeed, it’s against your statutory mandate here at VOA. Censorship, wokeness, political correctness, it all points in one direction – authoritarianism cloaked as moral righteousness. It’s similar to what we’re seeing at Twitter, and Facebook, and Apple, and on too many university campuses today. It’s not who we are. It’s not who we are as Americans. And it’s not what Voice of America should be. It’s time we simply put woke-ism to sleep. And you can lead the way. You all know this, it’s why you came here. There’s a new dawn here at Voice of America. The American public doesn’t know this, but when Michael took office, some 1,500 employees – almost 40% of the workforce – had been improperly vetted – including many with high-level security clearances. VOA was rubber-stamping J-1 visas for foreign nationals, including some from Communist China. We shouldn’t be doing that. We have plenty of Mandarin-language speakers here in America, and we are building, growing, teaching, educating more committed patriots, some of Chinese American descent who are amazing people. The Trump Administration team is working to fix these national security threats. We want to vet employees properly; we want to reorient VOA to its mission of truth and unbiased reporting. We want to depoliticize what takes place here, it’s too important for the American people and for the world. Returning this organization to its Charter and its charge to spread the message of freedom, democracy, and American exceptionalism. This isn’t about politicizing these institutions; we’re trying to take politics out. And that’s a pretty good feature story for whoever wants to write it up. As Secretary of State, I’m telling you all of this because I want the best for the people here and for this organization because you are vital to helping America shine light into the darkest places, with the power that only America can muster. Governments like those in China, Iran, North Korea, they don’t have the respect for the universal dignity of every human being in the way that American does, indeed that is what America was founded upon. Those regimes are anathema to everything that our nation stands for. We, we know that government exists to serve the people. They, they believe that people exist to serve the government. VOA’s work is vital. As I said before, you are the tip of freedom’s spear. Every week, 278 million people listen to VOA in 47 languages. There are Iranians who are listening to you, wondering if they’ll ever be able to shed their Islamist shackles. There are Moldovans and Ukrainians who want truthful reporting, not Russian disinformation and propaganda. There are Chinese citizens who are tired of a regime that’s done nothing but brutalize them since 1949. There are Venezuelans who want to know the truth of the Maduro regime’s corruption. There are oppressed people all over the globe who still turn to America for hope. I know many of you, especially those of you overseas, continue and have done heroic work, thank you. I want to commend VOA’s Hong Kong reporting team, which faced police intimidation, harassment, and attacks, but still got the job done. My highest praise, well done. You were behind the barricades with the freedom fighters, telling their stories – you’re upholding VOA’s finest traditions and continuing to be the voice of American exceptionalism. I also want to pay tribute to members of the other radio services who are here and listening. The only Uyghur-language news service in the world is run by RFA. You’ve told everyone who will listen, indeed some who didn’t want to, the truth about the CCP’s atrocities against its own people in Xinjiang – the stain of the century. And you’ve done so despite the fact that the CCP has jailed the relatives of at least six RFA journalists in Xinjiang's internment camps and continues to threaten you and your families simply for doing your jobs. Your work takes courage. Please keep telling everyone who will listen what’s happening in the toughest parts of the world. The world expects it, and America will be better off for it. I’ll leave you, I want to leave you with a quote that conveys why VOA’s mission is so important, before I take some questions from Bob. This quote’s from a ways back, it’s from George Washington. He said, ‘Truth will ultimately prevail where there is pains to bring it to light.’ When America brings truth to the world, we bring light. Don’t forget that, that’s what you do. May God bless you. May God Bless the Voice of America. And God bless these United States. Thank you all.”

 REILLY: “Thank you Mr. Secretary. Some of the questions I have for you-- were fielded from our division directors who wanted to also have their input -- to get you to answer some of these. But let me begin with this one. This isn't a commercial media, we can afford to tell the full truth about America, and the amplitude of American life and all of its facets. In your many travels in your recent years. What would you adjudge, as those parts of America, that are least known by foreign audiences that we need to tell them about?”

POMPEO: “Yeah. You know, that's a really good question. If I have a chance to hmm—and a moment where we are away from the formal business, there I often ask ambassadors or foreign ministers-- when you were last in the States, what did you do? Where did you go to see? The answer is always-- almost always, I went to New York, I went to Washington, I went to San Francisco, or I went to Los Angeles. The adventurous some may have traveled all the way to Boston. Boy, that's not representative of all of who America is-- I'm from Kansas. There's a different-- It's a different place in so many ways. It's engaged in different businesses, it’s engaged-- its government is different, its people think about the world in a different way. These stories from places other than the coasts, are important. And that, that extends to rural parts of South Carolina to Appalachian, to folks who live up in Minnesota and along our northern border along Canada. There's so many different facets of the United States that I think if you asked people around the world. They would only know this place we are here-- in Washington or maybe our financial center in New York. I hope that you all get a chance to tell those other stories. And I'd add one last piece. It's not just geographic. It's not just where it is, you could find right here in Washington. Dozens and dozens of different stories about different pieces of the things, the institutions that make America so unique, so special, these-- these things that our Founders called the small platoons. Our civic organizations, right? How many of you are members of the PTA, trying to help your kid’s school be just a little bit better. How many of you participate in a church group on Wednesday evenings, where you have your chili feed and you just gather. Those are important parts of American life that have made us so unique and so special and I, I want people all across the world to see those things, because those institutions form bedrock of our nation, and they can help their countries too.”

REILLY: “Thank you. Mr. Secretary, you've made some very eloquent speeches about the relationship between American founding principles and US foreign policy. How would you prioritize those fundamental rights, some of which you refer to in your remarks? When you-- with the limited time with foreign heads of state, want to have a clear message. You've been very forthright on freedom of religion, freedom of the press, freedom of-- How do you prioritize those, or is it-- is the prioritization is it is the prioritization custom made for the country you're addressing?”

POMPEO: "You know Bob, it certainly does vary by where you are and the situation that you find that government and and frankly the traditions of that country. The Unalienable Rights Commission, led by Professor Mary Ann Glendon, and Peter Berkowitz at the State Department was a great, it's a great report. It's 50 pages. I'd urge you to go read it. You'll agree with some of it. Some you may not. But what it tried to do was to take this, this Human Rights Project from the 20th century that has just fallen away. It lost its capacity to understand the things that were contained in our founding about how human rights are formed. It moved away even from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. And what I wanted to do in that was a reground American foreign policy and how we thought about human rights and I think the report captures that pretty well. Your point about religious freedom and the capacity to speak freely to two core rights that if a nation gets it wrong, it will be less secure. It will be less prosperous. Its people will be less whole. And so we've spent a lot of time talking about those issues around the world. We've made progress in certain places. Other places we've not. But it's important that American leaders, not only in the Secretary of State, but all of us, acknowledge those shortcomings when we speak with foreign leaders and get them headed in a better direction for their people. I'm proud of the work we've done in this regard. These principles matter. Their execution implementation is complex because foreign policy always is. There are competing priorities. But America can never walk away from those central principles and understandings and we know the difference between rights respecting countries and those that aren't. And we have an obligation to call each of them, precisely what they are."

REILLY: "Now as you all know, we're at the cusp of a change in administrations. On certain foreign policy issues, there seems to have formed a bipartisan consensus. For instance, perhaps China on both sides of the aisle is seen as the principal challenge to the United States today. Are there others? North Korea, Venezuela, Iran? On which of these do you expect some continuity with the new administration that where do you perhaps see what may come as the biggest changes?"

POMPEO: "Look, it's an important question. Leaders always want to understand that when you make a commitment to them that it will survive. We have elections every two years, your federal elections. We have presidential elections every four years. Look, your point about the threat from the Chinese Communist Party I think is right. President Trump rightly identified this when he started campaigning back in 2015 as the singular threat to the centrality of Western thought in the world. The idea that we're going to have a rules based system, the respect of property rights and human dignity. China is singular in the threat it poses to those things. And I do think there's a consensus there. I've worked with Democrats on many important issues on issues in Hong Kong and issues as I referred to the Uyghurs in Xinjiang and the atrocities taking place there. So I do hope that stays the same. I hope too even in the Middle East even where the previous administration had a different approach with respect to the Islamic Republic of Iran. It's not 2015. What has taken place in the Middle East in these last four years, whether that's the efforts we have put to constrain the theocracy of the kleptocrats in charge in Iran.The work we have done with the Abrahamic accords, the work that we've done to recognize the fundamental understandings of Israel as a nation that has a right to exist, and its capital is in Jerusalem, and is the home of the Jewish people there. Those are things that I believe will be lasting because I think the people of those nations want them to last. And I hope the next administration will continue to build on them in a way that continues to build out peace and prosperity among all the nations in the Middle East. I am hopeful that that will take place.”

REILLY: “I noticed over the weekend you signed a joint declaration with four other foreign ministers, Australia, UK, New Zealand, regarding the recent arrests in Hong Kong. You also removed the restraints on high level diplomatic contact contacts between the United States and Taiwan, and apparently the US Ambassador to the UN will be in Taiwan soon. What do you expect to accomplish with this flurry?”

POMPEO: “You know, flurry—I -- I find funny.”

REILLY: “I should have chosen another word.”

POMPEO: “Yes, but no, I get it. Like I wish these things had been done a long time ago. These weren't rushed, these were considered efforts that we made, and they're important part of the strategy that we've laid out with respect to how to protect and preserve American freedoms, from the challenge that the Chinese Communist Party presents. Look one of the core problems-- I gave some remarks where I talked about China, and said, ‘no matter what it is they say, we must distrust and verify.’ You refer to the arrest of these some 50 people in Hong Kong. The Chinese Communist Party made a promise to the people of Hong Kong and they walked away from it. The Chinese Communist Party has a commitment, instead of understandings we have with respect to Taiwan, we need to hold the parties accountable to those commitments as well. The Chinese Communist Party has already promised President Obama they wouldn't arm islands in the South China Sea and they turned around and did it and there was almost no cost imposed. We have attempted to deliver a clear understanding of the requirements that we have for the Chinese Communist Party, and how it should behave, that aren’t, frankly, very different from what we expect of any nation with respect to how they interact with the United States. And we do that because we have a responsibility to preserve and protect security and prosperity for the American people. Our policy with respect to the Chinese Communist Party has furthered that. This will be a long challenge; the Chinese Communist Party has a clear intent for hegemonic dominance. And we have an obligation and responsibility to the American people and frankly to freedom loving people around the world, to make sure that that is not the world that our children and grandchildren live in.”

REILLY: It's interesting, in meeting with the division directors of Voice of America, how frequently in those meetings the name of China comes up. When I asked them, ‘What's on the horizon, what are you noticing?’ It's China. Latin America? China. East Africa? China. And it's not simply the Belt and Road initiative, it's their information strategy, how they get affiliates in those regions of the world, how they feed them free stuff, and their, as you know, whole of government approach. Now the United States isn't whole of government, but Voice of America is here to do our part, through our bureaus and through our reporting. What do you think we can do better to help highlight the dangers these things represent when seen together rather than as a separate series of approaches?”

POMEO: “This challenge is in fact comprehensive. Out administration began by working on the economic side of this, the President placed tariffs on Chinese goods, he's tried to stop intellectual properties from denying tens of millions of jobs in the United States of America because they would steal our information, take it back to China, build it, and then dump it here in the United States. It's information you talked about, that this is ongoing. Take the issue of the Wuhan virus. It has now-- I understand the Chinese Communist Party is now going to permit the World Health Organization to go in and find out where this all began, but it took months and months of effort to do that. We are now more than a year on, we still don't have access to important information about how the virus began. It's important for health and safety and to make sure that something like this doesn't come out of China, again. Your team can report these things, report these facts. To your point about it being a global phenomenon, I have a bureau. I have a China desk. I have a Pacific Bureau, we have an Indo-Pacific strategy, but every one of my ambassadors and chiefs of mission understands that China presents a challenge in their country, wherever they may be, in Africa, and Latin America, in Southeast Asia for sure. And our team on the ground is working to protect American security from the Chinese Communist Party in the country that they have been assigned to. I hope your reporters, no matter where they find themselves, if they're in South Africa, or in Morocco, or wherever they are, observes the activities of the Chinese Communist Party inside of their country, and how it impacts the people of those countries as well.”

REILLY: “If I may ask the last question. This one more related to Russia. The United States seems to be shrinking its footprint in Africa, so is France, Russia is increasing its. Is this the result of a judgment on the part of the United States that disorder on the African continent is less of a problem or less of a threat to our interests—or how would you--?”

POMPEO: “So the forces-- the disposition that DOD has made has really been about the counterterrorism fight more broadly. How is it that we allocate US resources to keep the homeland safe? So the decisions the President has made with respect to Afghanistan, and the Middle East broadly, Syria, you talk about North Africa as well, has been to allocate the capacity of the United States to preserve and protect the homeland. I'm always mindful, and it's easy to write about, if you just focus on troop numbers alone, if you say the United States used to have 1000 people now they only have 800, or they used to have 800 and they only have 400, you may well be missing America's capacity to preserve and protect itself. I was the-- I was the director of the CIA. I know the other tools and capabilities that we can bring. They are unseen, they don't get reported from the podium at the Department of Defense, but the American people should know President Trump has been unambiguous about getting it right, making sure we put fewer of our young men and women in harm's way, and never giving up the responsibility we have to ensure that terrorism, or at least the risk that a terror act takes place and hurts Americans, whether they're here in the United States, or elsewhere in the world as well.”

REILLY: “Great. Mr. Secretary, I can’t thank you enough for gracing us with your presence today. It was very kind of you to make the trip, and it’s deeply appreciated by me and by everyone else here. Please join me in a round of applause for Secretary of State Michael Pompeo.”

POMPEO: “Thank you, it was a pleasure. Thank you all.”

(*This transcript provided by Voice of America*)