

International Trends of the coming US Administration

By: Dr. Abdullah Robin

President elect Donald Trump outlined policies that could change international relations significantly, and developments in the US Senate between the 10th and 13th of January, including open investigative sessions as part of the procedure for approving Trump's nominees for his new cabinet have shed light on future relations with Russia, China, Mexico and the Middle East.

Under Trump, the US will give Russia a new role in international affairs in the fight against Islamic extremism. Trump told the *Wall Street Journal* on the 13th January that newly-imposed sanctions on Russia could be lifted: "If you get along and if Russia is really helping us, why would anybody have sanctions if somebody's doing some really great things?" Trump's nominee for secretary of state, Rex Tillerson, told the US Senate Foreign Relations Committee on the 11th of January that, "while Russia seeks respect and relevance on the global stage, its recent activities have disregarded America's interests. Russia today poses a danger but it is not unpredictable in advancing its own interests," which implies acceptance that Russia can be given a new role on the global stage. Tillerson as the former CEO of Exxon Mobil has long experience of negotiating deals with Russia. James Mattis, who Trump picked as Secretary of Defense told the Senate Armed Services Committee on the 12th of January: "The most important thing is that we recognize the reality of what we deal with Mr. Putin and we recognize that he is trying to break the North Atlantic alliance, and that we take the steps. . . to defend ourselves where we must." Mattis is liked by the Republican Party and his appointment makes it easier for them to accept a new "deal" with Russia. With the beginning of deployment of 4000 US soldiers in Eastern Europe at a ceremony in Poland on the 14th January, the US will be able to negotiate with Russia from a position of strength. Turkish President Erdogan said on the 13th of January that the US would attend talks on Syria with Russia and Turkey on the 23rd January. Trump's team confirmed that this was discussed in a telephone conversation on the 28th of December between the Russian ambassador to the US and Michael Flynn, who was appointed as national security advisor. Flynn published a book last year in which he argued that the ideology of Islam is the major threat to the US.

China is threatening international trade routes and the Trans Pacific Partnership (TPP) for free trade, which excluded China, was a strategy of Obama to contain China. However, Trump has made a promise to withdraw from the TPP immediately and this means that another strategy is needed to contain China. Trump has repeatedly said that he will put more pressure on China and has said that the 'One China' policy might be changed, but in his comments to the *Wall Street Journal* he said that he wants China to open its markets to the US, which will be a key test of Trump's presidency.

Trump's opposition to free trade worried some in the Republican Party, but it seems that they have got Trump under control, because after early talk of ending all free trade agreements he has only confirmed ending the TPP, which was really only a disguised policy of containment for China. Trump said that he would end the NAFTA Agreement with Mexico and Canada, but Trump has been quiet on this recently. Instead, he boasted during a press conference on the 11th of January about humiliating Mexico by making them pay for a wall to keep immigrants out of the US.

James Mattis agreed with Trump that Iran should not be a regional power, which would require that another power take Iran's place. Russia and Israel might be given bigger roles in the Middle East under the new administration, but only if Trump survives as president. A scandal threatens him after members of Trump's own Republican Party employed a retired British intelligence officer to gather information on immoral activities, which was published on the 11th of January. On the 13th of January, the US Senate Select Committee on Intelligence announced an "inquiry into Russian intelligence activities," that would include "links between Russia and individuals associated with political campaigns". In addition to embarrassing activities in Russian hotels, his team is accused of receiving Russian intelligence. Trump's team will need to understand their own Party, just as much as world affairs, in order to survive the next 4 years.

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