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Trump's Cabinet Appointees**

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**International experience. Local knowledge.**

# Trump’s Cabinet Nominees

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## Introduction

President Elect Donald J. Trump will be kicking off his presidency with some notably controversial cabinet picks. For those across the globe, there is legitimate concern regarding how these appointments, who assist the president in formulating policy, will impact decisions. The fact is that the actions of the United States can and will directly impact security and stability in the Middle East, whether for the better or for the worse. As a Gulf-based security and risk management advisory company, it is important for us and our clients to understand how this might unfold. This report, therefore, is intended to be a primer for Trump's foreign policy-related cabinet picks, listed below in alphabetical order of appointed position.<sup>1</sup>

Each section presents the candidate's experience and background, as well as their positions on key issues that affect foreign policy in the Middle East and brief assessments. Our focus includes, but is not limited to, their stances on Russia, regional allies, the nuclear agreement with Iran, the various conflicts in the Middle East, and attitudes toward Islam. We would be remiss in failing to note that we did not touch on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict: This is a longstanding issue that largely does not impact our or our client's core countries of interest.

Some of these profiles are lengthy, detailing an individual with relevant experience that has been tracked and archived and can inform assessments. Others are much shorter, revealing cabinet picks whose government and policy inexperience mirrors that of Trump's. Each are presented objectively: This report aims to inform, not opine.

The problem with making fact-based assessments regarding the impact of Trump's cabinet members is that their influence, or lack thereof, is entirely dependent upon whom Trump allows to hold that influence. His behaviour and public statements indicate a propensity for contradiction, something that is replicated in the positions held by his cabinet picks. For a man who once said that he knew more about Islamic State (IS) than the generals, he has nominated three for cabinet positions (Lieutenant General Michael Flynn as National Security Advisor, General James Mattis as Defence Secretary, and General John Kelly as Homeland Security Secretary, the latter of whom is not discussed in this report), along with West Point graduate, Representative Mike Pompeo, as CIA chief. This has raised concerns as to whether there are sufficiently diverse viewpoints among those who will be advising him. Trump has also chosen individuals who support improved ties with Russia and those who object to any warming of relations with Moscow; those who are opposed to the nuclear deal with Iran and those who want to see its preservation; those who embrace allies and those who are sceptical. This is not to mention a chief strategist who is closely aligned with the alt-right movement.

Trump could defer most of the decision making to his vice president and cabinet, or he could choose a select few whose opinions he prioritises over others. The bottom line is that the power these individuals wield could wax and wane with the weather or Trump's moods. It is also important acknowledge the influence that under-secretaries and staffers can hold, assuming their cabinet heads heed their advice. In other words, while we can make as quality assessments as possible, the foreign policy of the Trump administration has and continues to be a relatively large question mark.

Le Beck will, however, endeavour to follow this report with periodic updates to address changing environments, notable under-secretaries or ambassadors, potentially evolving viewpoints of his cabinet picks, and an evaluation as to the accuracies of the assessments we include herein.

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<sup>1</sup> For a brief overview on how Trump specifically might impact the Gulf, Yemen, and Iran, we invite you to read a [17 November 2016](#) piece in the *International Business Times UK* written by Miriam Eps, the Regional Security Analyst - Team Lead at Le Beck International.

## Senate Confirmations

Confirmation hearings [are going strong](#). And with the new Senate now Republican-controlled, it is highly unlikely that any Trump appointee will be blocked. This is because, under outgoing President Obama, the Democratic-controlled Senate invoked what is commonly referred to as the “nuclear option”, which means that, for all appointments except the Supreme Court, only a simple majority of 51 votes is required for confirmation. In addition, the revelation of particularly damaging information during the vetting and confirmation process often results in the individual being withdrawn from nomination, thus avoiding an actual vote blocking the appointment in the Senate. As yet, no such information has been revealed, while two of the more contentious appointments, namely, Steve Bannon and Flynn do not require confirmation. Senior advisor and Trump son-in-law Jared Kushner also needs no confirmation, although he may face obstacles connected to anti-nepotism laws.

There are, however, two individuals covered in this report who could face some difficulties, one due to bipartisan concerns and the other due to a technical process:

The former is Secretary of State nominee Rex Tillerson, who has seen some bipartisan concern regarding his perceived stance on Russia and relations with Russian President Vladimir Putin. On December 11, Republican Senator from Florida, Marco Rubio, [tweeted](#) that “being a ‘friend of Vladimir’ is not an attribute I am hoping for from a Secretary of State” and has stated that he [cannot yet commit](#) to voting for him. he Lindsey Graham, a Republican Senator from South Carolina, made similar comments, [describing](#) Putin’s presentation to Tillerson with Russia’s Order of Friendship as “a bit unnerving” and something that will raise questions. The nominee’s positions with regard to Russia and Putin specifically, and which are exclusively related to his former position as ExxonMobil CEO, are presented more in detail below.

The latter is Mattis, Trump’s appointment for Secretary of Defence. As opposed to a simple majority vote, he will need a supermajority in the Senate. This is because Congress must pass legislation that grants him a waiver to serve in the Cabinet: Under current law, military personnel are required to have been out of service for seven years before being able to serve in senior defence positions. Mattis, on the other hand, left the military in 2013. Already, there is one Democratic Senator who expressed opposition to granting this waiver, namely, [Kirsten Gillibrand](#) from New York. However, it is unlikely that she will garner enough support to block the vote. While other Democratic Senators have expressed some concern, Mattis has bipartisan respect and admiration and is also perceived by many Democrats one of the few “voice of reason” in Trump’s planned cabinet that should be granted a waiver. The Senate already approved the waiver in a [vote of 81-17](#) and the House of Representatives is expected to follow suit.

## Central Intelligence Agency – Representative Michael “Mike” Pompeo



### Profile

Mike Pompeo is a third-term US Congressman from the fourth district of Kansas. He graduated first in his class at the US Military Academy at West Point in 1986, after which he served as a cavalry officer. After completing active duty, he attended Harvard Law School. Rather than practicing law, he founded and served as CEO of Thayer Aerospace, a company that provided components for the commercial aerospace, defence, and space industries. He then went on to be president of Sentry International, an energy company involved in the sales and service of drilling equipment.

Pompeo’s foreign policy and intelligence experience is largely derived from his election to the House of Representatives and service on the House Intelligence Committee (HIC). The HIC oversees America’s intelligence-gathering efforts. Notably, Pompeo was also appointed to the House Select Benghazi Committee, which was tasked with investigating the 2012 attacks

against the US diplomatic compound in Benghazi, Libya. He has accused former Secretary of State and Democratic presidential nominee Hillary Clinton of being behind a wide-ranging cover up of the Benghazi incident despite the committee finding “no new evidence of wrongdoing”. Pompeo, along with another Republican representative from Ohio, added an addendum to the report alleging, among others, that the Department of State “was seemingly more concerned with politics and Secretary Clinton’s legacy than with protecting its people in Benghazi”.

The following are positions that Pompeo has taken on key foreign policy issues that do or can impact the Middle East:

- Allies: Pompeo appears to hold a more traditional view of US allies, as opposed to some of the statements made by Trump during the campaign regarding the need for them to “pay their fair share”. For example, in [January 2016](#) and [February 2016](#) statements following nuclear and missile tests by North Korea, he stated that the US must “continue to stand with our partners in the region, especially South Korea”.
- Attitude toward Islam: Pompeo has emphasized on more than one occasion that Muslim religious figures have a responsibility to persistently condemn attacks by radical Islamist groups. He stated in the past that “Islamic clerics in mosques and the madrassas around the world have an obligation to consistently denounce terrorism done in the name of their faith.”
- CIA’s former interrogation and detention program: During his [confirmation hearings](#), Pompeo stated that he would not restart enhanced interrogation techniques even if ordered to do so by the President. This addressed concern regarding his position on this issue, as he previously described CIA interrogation and detention techniques as “[within the law, within the constitution](#)”, referring to practices like waterboarding that were described in a 2014 report by the Senate Intelligence Committee as unconstitutional. He has also expressed his opposition to closing the Guantanamo Bay detention centre.
- Drone program: In a [2013 article](#) in *The Topeka Capital-Journal*, Pompeo called for making drone actions more transparent, but stated that the President “should have a lot of authority to make decisions about when they’ve identified someone who is trying to kill Americans, to be able to go in and get them”.
- Nuclear deal with Iran: In July 2016, Pompeo [wrote an opinion piece](#) for Fox News arguing that it put the US at “increased risk”. In it, he explained that, although the agreement “can perhaps delay Iran’s nuclear weapons programs for a few years [...] it has virtually guaranteed that Iran

will have the freedom to build an arsenal of nuclear weapons at the end of the commitment". Pompeo has also accused the Obama administration of paying ransom to Iran for the release of prisoners, referring to a 400 million USD payment that was owed as part of a long-standing dispute and which was used as leverage in the prisoner negotiations. In his confirmation hearings, he described Iran as "the world's largest state sponsor of terror" but notably stated that, although he was against the nuclear deal while serving in Congress, his "role will change" as CIA director.

- Russia: In a September 2013 [opinion piece](#) in the Washington Post, Pompeo wrote that "Russia continues to side with these rogue states and terrorist organisations, following Vladimir Putin's pattern of gratuitous and unpunished affronts to US interests". He reiterated this position during his confirmation hearings, describing Russia as "invading and occupying Ukraine, threatening Europe, and doing nothing to aid in the destruction and defeat of ISIS".
- Syria and Hezbollah: In an [October 2016](#) press release, Pompeo criticised then-Secretary of State John Kerry for "ignoring the evil actions of Hezbollah" and Obama for having a "weak Syria strategy [that] continues to embolden enemies of the United States". Pompeo initially had backed the use of force in Syria, although this became a moot point with the agreement between Russia and the US for the removal of chemical weapons.

## Assessments

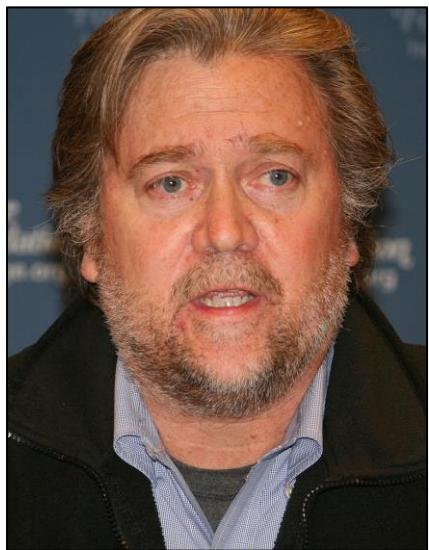
Pompeo represents a more traditional appointment with traditionally Republican views, particularly in comparison to some others that Trump has named. This includes his positions regarding Russia and Putin, with Pompeo stating that "it's pretty clear about what took place here, about Russian involvement in efforts to hack information and to have an impact on American democracy [...] This was an aggressive action taken by senior leadership inside of Russia". This will bring him into conflict with other, less traditional picks like [Flynn](#) for National Security Advisor, [Bannon](#) for chief strategist, and possibly [Tillerson](#) for Secretary of State, although the latter has denied that his positions as Secretary of State will mirror those as ExxonMobil's CEO. This also includes Trump, who himself cannot be said to hold traditionally conservative positions, although he [admitted](#) in his recent press conference that Russia was, indeed, behind the hacking.

Pompeo also may even find himself in conflict with other traditional figures like [Mattis](#), Trump's candidate for Secretary of Defence. Despite Pompeo's statement that his "role will change" as CIA director, his emphatic opposition to the Iran deal in the past should not be ignored. Mattis, on the other hand, has described dismantling the Iran deal as dangerous.

It is also worthwhile to note that Pompeo initially backed Senator Marco Rubio for president and refused to support Trump until it became clear that he would be the Republican nominee. Even then, however, he reportedly did so reluctantly. At the same time, Trump seemingly has not held a grudge, given that he tapped Pompeo for a cabinet position.

Finally, it is important to highlight that Pompeo addressed one of the main concerns and criticisms of his appointment during his confirmation hearings. This refers to his stated intention to refuse any introduction of enhanced interrogation techniques, even should the President order it be done.

## Chief Strategist – Stephen “Steve” Bannon



### Profile

Steve Bannon grew up in Virginia in a self-described “blue-collar, Irish Catholic, pro-Kennedy, pro-union family of Democrats”. Upon leaving university, Bannon signed up for the US Navy, during which he spent at least part of the time deployed at sea on a destroyer in the Arabian Sea and Persian Gulf. This is where he states that he grew disillusioned with then-President Jimmy Carter and subsequently became an admirer of former US President Ronald Reagan. After leaving the Navy, he worked as an assistant for the chief of Naval operations at the Pentagon and completed an MA in national security studies at Georgetown University. This was followed by his attendance at Harvard Business School where he completed his MBA and then joined investment bank Goldman Sachs. In 1990, he left Goldman Sachs in order to start up his own investment firm called Bannon & Co that specialised in media,

including MGM’s studio financing and acquisitions for Polygram Records. This seemingly led him to enter Hollywood productions, acquiring a stake in the television series *Seinfeld* and becoming an executive producer of various films. He even began producing his own, primarily ones with a political bent.

In 2004, for example, he made a documentary celebrating Reagan, then later one about then-Republican vice presidential candidate Sarah Palin and films about the Tea Party. He also began making frequent appearances on Fox News. In 2012, he moved further to the right politically, taking over *Breitbart News*, which was described by Bloomberg as “a haven for people who think Fox News is too polite and restrained”. *Breitbart* is known for, among others, racist, sexist, anti-Semitic, and homophobic headlines and articles and is considered to be a mouthpiece for what has become known as the “alt-right”. This refers to a group with a far-right nationalistic ideology that rejects mainstream conservatism and often embraces implicit or explicit notions of white supremacy, including positions that oppose immigration and LGBTQ rights. His second wife has also accused him in court of domestic abuse and anti-Semitism. Bannon has denied these charges, stating that although the alt-right movement may attract extremist elements, it does not represent the entirety of the movement or himself.

Also in 2012, Bannon founded and became co-chairman of the Government Accountability Institute (GAI), described as a “nonpartisan 501(c)(3) research organisation staffed with lawyers, data scientists, and forensic investigators”. Its goal is reportedly to study government corruption and malfeasance that will be picked up by the mainstream media and which, in practice, aims to discredit the “establishment”, against which Bannon is staunchly opposed. During the election, GAI released two books, one on the Clintons and one on Jeb Bush, the former governor of Florida and a contender for the 2016 Republican presidential nominee. The one on the Clintons, for example, was covered in the *New York Times*. In other words, Bannon took a two-pronged approach to pushing his agenda: One that pursued fact-based analysis targeting primarily government corruption and cronyism (GAI) and the other that pushed contentious and bigoted articles (*Breitbart*).

His political experience, which Le Beck does not consider to include his history as a Fox News commentator, head of Breitbart, and chairman of the GAI, solely comes from his appointment in August 2016 as Trump’s campaign manager.

- Allies: An article in [The Hill](#) describes Bannon as a “long time sceptic of international alliances” such as NATO and a supporter of Brexit, referring to the UK’s referendum in support of exiting the European Union.
- Attitude toward Islam: Bannon has [reportedly described](#) Islam as “political ideology”, Sharia (Islamic law) as “like Nazism, fascism, and communism”, and praised individuals that have expressed anti-Muslim sentiment. This includes Pamela Geller, who is described by the Southern Poverty Law Centre as “the anti-Muslim movement’s most visible and flamboyant figurehead”. Bannon also stated in a [2014 speech](#) delivered to a conference at the Vatican “we are in an outright war against jihadist Islamic fascism”. In his answer to a questioner, he further stated that he advocates a “very, very aggressive stance against radical Islam”.
- Russia: In the abovementioned 2014 speech, he described Putin as “the state capitalist of kleptocracy” and “very, very, very intelligent”. He warned of staying on guard of Putin’s efforts to play to social conservatives with his message of traditional values, explaining that he and “his cronies[...] are really an imperialist power that want to expand”. Bannon also stated that Russia, as well as China, are engaging in a “disturbing” strand of capitalism he describes it as a “kind of crony [...] brutal form of capitalism that is really about creating wealth and creating value for a very small subset of people”.

## Assessments

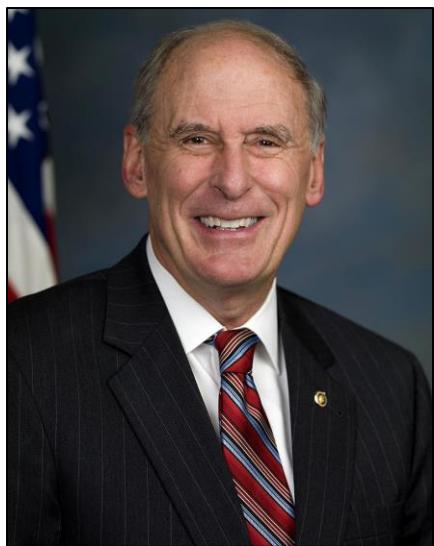
Bannon is, by far, the most controversial appointment that Trump has made given his affiliation to the alt-right and the stories that *Breitbart* has disseminated. For many critics, Republican and Democrat alike, Bannon’s appointment normalises the alt-right movement, including the element that advocates for policies of white supremacy.

Given his lack of experience in political and governmental affairs, it is somewhat difficult to pinpoint his precise positions on key foreign policy issues. However, there are assessments that can be made based on past statements and the domestic positions he holds. Bannon’s anti-establishment, populist, and nationalist sentiments, for example, in addition to his reported views on traditional alliances suggests that he is likely to support similar figures internationally. In Europe this means support for pro-Brexit politicians and French National Front leader Marine Le Pen. His reported distaste for the presidency of George H.W. Bush, moreover, indicates that he likely holds negative views on the idea of *Pax Americana* and nation-building, although his statements in the 2014 Vatican speech indicate that, on certain issues, he supports aggressive military action.

That 2014 speech also indicates that he may remain wary of Putin, which would put him at odds with Trump and others in the cabinet, including [Flynn](#) and possibly [Tillerson](#). At the same time, being wary of the Russian president is not the same thing as being opposed to improved relations with Moscow, with his position vis-a-vis radical Islam suggesting that he may support working more closely with Russia on issues like IS in Syria.

Importantly, Bannon also supports the notion of “America First”, one of Trump’s more popular slogans. What this likely means is that Bannon’s positions on foreign policy are likely to prioritise US interests

## Director of National Intelligence – Senator Daniel “Dan” Coats



### Profile

Daniel “Dan” Coats is a [former US Senator](#) from Indiana, serving from 1989 to 1999, as well as from 2011-2017, declining to run for re-election in the 2016 elections. Prior to serving as a Senator, Coats graduated from Wheaton College with a BA in political science 1965 and then Indiana University School of Law in 1971. In between those two he served in the United States Army. After receiving his law degree and working briefly in life insurance, Coats was a district representative for then-House of Representatives member and future Vice President Dan Quayle. When Quayle was elected to the Senate in 1980, Coats ran for and won his House of Representatives seat. His career in the Senate came after Quayle was elected vice president and Coats was appointed to fill his Senate seat in 1988, where he served on the Senate Armed Services and Intelligence Committees.

In 1998, he returned to practicing law as a special counsel for the law firm of Verner, Liipfert, Bernhard, MacPherson and Hand. Subsequently, from 2001 to 2005, Coats served as Ambassador to Germany under the second Bush administration. After returning from Germany, Coats worked as a lobbyist; co-chairing the Washington government relations office of King & Spaulding. In 2010, Coats was then re-elected to the Senate and again served on Senate Intelligence Committee.

The following are positions that Coats has taken on key foreign policy issues that do or can impact the Middle East:

- Allies: Coats is a strong supporter of NATO, [expressing this position](#) while at the Senate in April 2016. In 2015, he even proposed [in an op-ed](#) published by *Politico* that called for a NATO mission to assist in securing Turkey’s border with Syria.
- IS: In January 2016, Coats [co-sponsored](#) a joint-resolution aimed at giving the Obama administration wider authority in combating IS.
- Nuclear deal with Iran: In September 2015, Coats [voted](#) in favour of advancing a Republican resolution that would block US involvement in the Iran nuclear deal. In an op-ed from that same month, he described the deal as [fatally flawed](#).
- Russia: As a member of the Senate Intelligence Committee, Coats [pushed](#) for the Obama administration to impose harsh sanctions on Russia over its annexation of Crimea. He also called on World Cup organisers to move the 2018 tournament from Moscow. As a result of these and other statements, Coats has been [banned](#) from Russia.

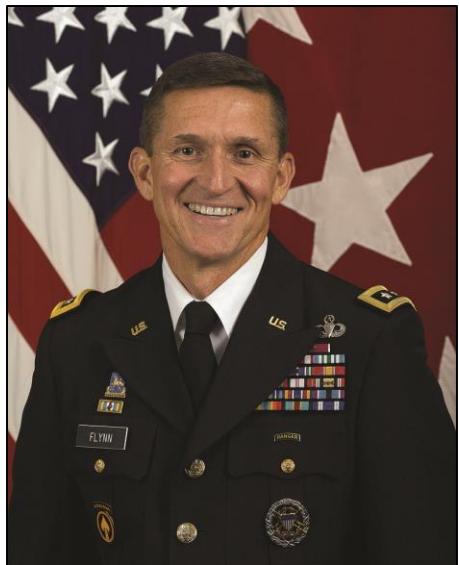
### Assessments

Coats is one of the more traditional picks for a cabinet level position, given his diplomatic and political experience, as well as his positions on various issues, which tends to be in line with the Republican Party generally. However, recent reports indicate that Trump may be [planning to weaken](#) the office of the Director of National Intelligence (DNI). If this occurs, it may have the knock-on effect of similarly weakening Coats himself although, as noted above, should Trump look to him as a reliable and/or preferred adviser than the power, or lack thereof, of the DNI will not impact this.

Similar to Trump’s other more traditional appointments, Coats’ views, particularly his stance toward Russia and NATO, could bring him into conflict with other members of Trump’s planned cabinet, such as [Flynn](#), [Bannon](#), and possibly [Tillerson](#).

It is perhaps worthwhile to note that Coats has had a long relationship with Vice President Elect Mike Pence. Should the cabinet picks unofficially divide along the lines of “Trump’s people” and “Pence’s people”, Coats is likely to fall in the latter. The President Elect’s reported emphasis on loyalty could reduce Coats’ influence if Trump perceives him as more loyal to Pence than himself.

## National Security Adviser – Lieutenant General Michael “Mike” Flynn



### Profile

Lieutenant General Michael “Mike” Flynn graduated with a degree in Management Science from University of Rhode Island in 1981 and was commissioned a second lieutenant in Military Intelligence. His first assignment was as a paratrooper of the 82nd Airborne Division at Fort Bragg, North Carolina. Over the next 30 years, Flynn served in a variety of command and staff positions in Military Intelligence and with US Special Forces. He served in both Iraq and Afghanistan.

In 2012, Barack Obama appointed Flynn as the Director of the Defence Intelligence Agency (DIA). During Flynn’s time at the DIA was marked with controversy and he was reportedly asked to step down in 2014. Anonymous sources within the DIA and the Department of Defence criticised Flynn’s

management style as “chaotic”, and “disruptive”. In mid-December, reports [also revealed](#) that during his time at the DIA Flynn was the subject of a military inquiry regarding the “inappropriate” sharing of classified intelligence with foreign military personnel. The Army ultimately decided not to pursue legal action, determining that “the sharing of classified information was not done knowingly and that there was no actual or potential damage to national security”.

Following his departure and subsequent retirement, Flynn developed a significant media profile and founded a consulting firm, Flynn Intel Group. He has frequently appeared on television as a commentator and analyst of Middle East issues. In 2016, Flynn published a book, *“The Field of Fight: How We Can Win the Global War Against Radical Islam and Its Allies”*.

Over the last several years, Flynn has made several controversial statements regarding Islam, the Middle East, and terrorism. He has also promoted various conspiracy theories. The following are examples:

- Flynn believes that there are [Arabic-language signs](#) on the US-Mexico border for the purpose of directing “radicalized Muslims” into the United States.
- Flynn has erroneously stated that American legislatures are [imposing Sharia law](#) on their citizens.
- Flynn [insinuated](#) that the Obama administration wilfully allowed the rise of IS.
- Flynn [tweeted](#) that the “fear of Muslims is rational.”
- Flynn [described](#) Islam “as a cancer” and an “ideology”, rather than a religion.
- Flynn has utilized his twitter account to [propagate](#) “fake news” on numerous occasions.

The following are positions that Flynn has taken on key foreign policy issues that do or can impact the Middle East:

- [Attitude toward Islam](#): See above.
- [Iran](#): In his book, Flynn argues for a [harder political line](#) on Iran, including information warfare. He also [described](#) Iran as a “linchpin” of a global anti-Western network which includes North Korea, China, Russia, Syria, Cuba, Bolivia, Venezuela and Nicaragua.
- [Russia](#): Flynn [gave a speech](#) at a 2015 event hosted by Russian state media outlet, RT. Flynn reportedly sat at the same table as Russian President Vladimir Putin. He has also been [linked](#) to a technology company, Brainwave Science, whose co-owner, Subu Kota, who was convicted in the 1990s of attempting to sell stolen material to Russia’s KGB spy agency. Trump’s

transition team, for its part, stated that Flynn “ended his association with Brainwave Science” and has neither met nor spoken with Kota.

- Turkey: In an op-ed for [The Hill](#), Flynn expressed support for government of Recep Tayyip Erdogan by arguing for the extradition of Erdogan critic, Fethullah Gulen, whose movement, known in Turkey as the Fethullah Terrorist Organisation (FETO), is accused by the Turkish government as being behind the 2016 July coup attempt. Multiple [media outlets](#) have [reported](#) that this was written while Flynn’s consulting firm was acting as a lobbyist on behalf of a company linked to the Turkish government.

### Assessments

Flynn represents one of the most controversial appointees of the incoming Trump administration. His hawkish views on the Middle East and comments regarding Islam aligns with those made Trump during the presidential campaign. He is likely to advocate for a more aggressive policy towards Iran and other nations he deems “anti-western”. Flynn’s statements regarding Russian activity in Syria suggest that he would support closer cooperation with the Russian military and shifting US military resources more exclusively to the fight against IS, which is also in line with statements made by Trump. It should be noted that this, as well as other positions taken and statements made, are inherently contradictory, much like the president-elect. Supporting closer cooperation with Russia despite its inclusion in the “anti-Western axis” is one example. His comments regarding Islam and his work for Turkey is another.

Should he pursue the abovementioned policy that advocates for closer cooperation with Russia, he is likely to find himself at odds with other members of Trump’s planned cabinet, including [Mattis](#), [Pompeo](#), and [Coats](#), as well as Vice President Elect Pence.

Meanwhile, taking into account Flynn’s proclivity for controversial statements and his high public profile, it is possible he will be asked to resign or otherwise leave the administration at some point in the not too distant future. Note that Flynn’s son, also named Michael, was reportedly forced out of the Trump transition team in December over his [penchant](#) for spreading conspiracy theories, including a debunked claim that Hillary Clinton was operating a child sex ring out of a pizza shop in Washington, D.C.

## Secretary of Defence – General James Mattis



### Profile

General James Mattis graduated with a bachelor's degree from Central Washington University in 1971 and was commissioned as a second lieutenant the following year. He then went on to serve in the United States Marine Corps for the next 41 years, eventually obtaining the rank of a four-star general in 2007. During his career, Mattis led several prominent military forces, including:

- 2010-2013: Commander of US Central Command
- 2007-2009: Commander of US Joint Forces Command
- 2006-2007: Commander of I Marine Expeditionary Force
- 2005-2006: Commander of Marine Corps Combat Development Command
- 2002-2004: Commander of the 1st Marine Division

He served in the First Gulf War, the Iraq War, and in Afghanistan. As head of US Central Command, Mattis oversaw all American forces serving in the Middle East and oversaw both the war in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Following his retirement from the Marine Corps in 2013, Mattis has maintained a relatively low public profile. He currently sits on the board of General Dynamics, a defence contractor, as well as Theranos, a biotech firm, and the Hoover Institute, a conservative think-tank. He has stated that, if confirmed (which he is likely to be) [he will](#) divest his stock and resign from the board of directors at General Dynamics, while also [recusing himself](#) from any matters involving that company for one year. Reports indicate that Mattis has already stepped down from Theranos and will need to resign from the Hoover Institute.

It was reported in April 2016 that a group of influential conservative donors [attempted to convince](#) Mattis to run as a third-party presidential candidate in the case that Donald Trump won the Republican nomination. However, Mattis [quickly dismissed](#) the idea.

The following are positions that Mattis has taken on key foreign policy issues that do or can impact the Middle East:

- [Allies](#): In a [2009 speech](#) given at NATO, Mattis advocated for an overhaul of the group's strategic posture. However, he is broadly supportive of the organization's goals and purpose. More recently, in his confirmation hearings at the Senate, he described the alliance as one of the most successful "probably ever" and stated that he will look to maintain the "strongest possible relationship".
- [Attitude toward Islam](#): In [response](#) to a self-asked question of whether "political Islam is in the best interest of the United States", Mattis stated that he "suggest[s] the answer is no, but we need to have the discussion".
- [Egypt](#): In April 2015, Mattis [argued](#) that, "the only way to support Egypt's maturation as a country with civil society, with democracy, is to support President el-Sisi" and that "...Egypt is a critical nation in terms of the future for stability in the Middle East".
- [Nuclear deal with Iran](#): Mattis has consistently taken a hard line against Iran. In [remarks](#) from April, Mattis described the Islamic Republic as, "the single most enduring threat to stability and peace in the Middle East". It was even reported in January 2013 that Mattis' dismissal from this final posting was due to the Obama administration's' concerns over his hawkish

views towards Iran. However, despite this, Mattis does not support “tearing up” the Iran nuclear agreement. He reiterated this position during his [confirmation hearings](#), describing it as “an imperfect arms control agreement” but that “when America gives her word, we have to live up to it and work with our allies”.

- [Russia](#): In a [2015 speech](#), Mattis described Russia’s foreign policy as, “security through instability.” He also stated that the most dangerous near-term security threat facing the US “[might be Russia](#)” and that Putin’s ultimate goal is the [dissolution of NATO](#). However, he believes it is important for the US to remain politically engaged with the Russian regime, as the opposite could lead to further global security challenges.

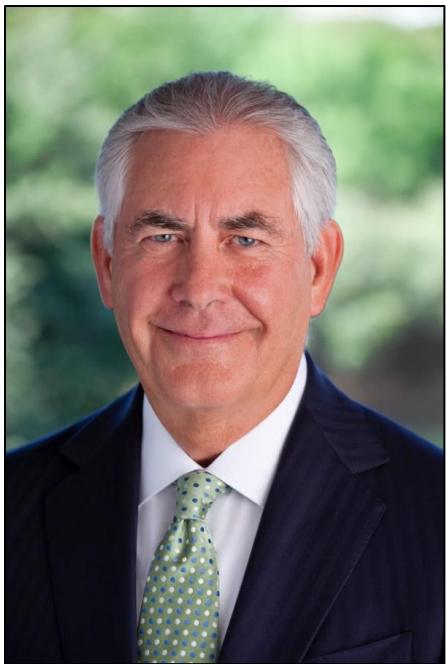
## Assessments

Despite Mattis’ hawkish views on Iran and Russia, he is seen as one of Trump’s most qualified appointments and his positions are located well within the mainstream. He is [widely respected](#) by his peers in the national security establishment and his nomination has received public support from prominent members of Congress of both parties. As noted above, objections from Democrats regarding the waiver needed for his appointment appear to be limited in scope and, after a successful vote in the Senate, is likely to be approved by the House of Representatives.

However, like with some other more traditional appointments, his views could be isolating in Trump’s cabinet. Should he continue to advocate for a more aggressive stance vis-a-vis Russia, for example, he is likely to find himself at odds with other members of Trump’s planned cabinet, including [Flynn](#) and potentially [Tillerson](#). His support for maintaining the Iran nuclear deal may also bring him into conflict with the president elect and figures like [Pompeo](#). The same may be true with regard to his stance on NATO and CIA interrogation and detention tactics: [Bannon](#) has long been a sceptic the former, while Pompeo has described the CIA techniques, which Mattis opposes, as “within the law”.

And while Mattis is highly likely to be confirmed, given reports of already existing disagreements between Mattis and Trump’s transition team regarding, for example, [Pentagon staffing](#), it is not difficult to imagine that Mattis’ tenure might be cut short due to more significant policy differences with both Trump and/or his other cabinet members.

## Secretary of State – Rex Tillerson



### Profile

Tillerson is the chairman and CEO of ExxonMobil Corporation, which is number nine on [Forbes' list](#) of the world's largest companies in 2016. He [retired](#) at the end of December 2016, three months shy of his mandatory retirement date of March 2017 when he will turn 65. Tillerson graduated from the University of Texas at Austin's Cockrell School of Engineering with a degree in civil engineering. That same year, he joined Exxon Company USA as a production engineer, rising up the ranks in the subsequent years. In 2016, Forbes listed Tillerson as the [24th most powerful person](#) in the world.

Tillerson's foreign policy experience stems exclusively from his travels and business dealing abroad while heading Exxon, including with high level officials and heads of state. This is where he developed ties with Russia and Putin beginning in the 1990s, when he headed Exxon's interests in Russia through partnerships with an energy company that has ties to Putin. In 2013, he was presented with the Order of Friendship, the

highest honour that a non-Russian can receive and intended for foreign nationals who effort to improve relations with Russia. ExxonMobil is also known to have suffered from the economic sanctions levied against Russia for its annexation of Crimea in 2014. Tillerson strongly criticised such sanctions, which has reportedly cost the company hundreds of millions of dollars.

Tillerson has, however, taken steps toward addressing the potential conflict of interest. Despite reports that there would be [some logistical problems](#) related to the potential divestment of the 2.6 million Exxon shares that Tillerson holds, he and the company announced in January 2017 that he would sever all ties if confirmed as Secretary of State. According to the [announcement from ExxonMobil](#), "the value of more than 2 million deferred ExxonMobil shares that he would have received over the next 10 years [will] be transferred to an independently managed trust and the ExxonMobil share awards [will] be cancelled". The trust will be barred from investing in ExxonMobil. In addition, Tillerson will "surrender entitlement to more than \$4.1 million in cash bonuses [...] and other benefits such as retiree medical and dental benefits, and administrative, financial and tax support".

Notably, in the introduction to the [first confirmation hearings](#), Senator Cornyn described Tillerson as "know[ing] who he works for". In other words, according to Cornyn, Tillerson's prior position as ExxonMobil will not impact his positions and actions as Secretary of State.

Where previously Tillerson's positions were largely unknown, more information became available following his initial confirmation hearings on January 11. The following covers some statements he made on key issues:

- [Attitude toward Islam and IS](#): In the hearings, Tillerson made sure to specify "radical Islam". Defeating IS, he stated, must be the "foremost priority in the Middle East. The demise of IS will also allow us to increase our attention on other agents of radical Islam, like al-Qaeda, the Muslim Brotherhood, and certain elements within Iran". He further stated that he is "not supporting blanket-type rejection of any particular group of people" when questioned regarding the so-called Muslim-ban.

- Allies: Tillerson stated during the hearings that “We must hold our allies accountable to the commitments they made. We cannot look the other way at allies who do not meet their obligations. This is an injustice not only to us, but to the longstanding friends that honour their promises”.
- Human rights: “It is unreasonable to expect that every foreign policy endeavour will be driven by human rights considerations alone”, he stated “especially when security of the American people is at stake. But our leadership demands actions specifically focused on improving the conditions of people the world over, utilising aid and, where appropriate, economic sanctions as instruments of foreign policy”. With regard to Saudi Arabia in particular, he **refused to label** the country as a human rights violator, describing it as making progress, albeit slowly, on these issues. He further argued that such labels are not the most effective way to make or encourage progress in Saudi Arabia or any other country and could, in fact, have the opposite effect.
- Nuclear deal with Iran: Tillerson stated that he supports a “full review of that agreement as well as any number of side agreements that are part of that agreement” but did not expressly reject it.
- Russia: “We need an open and frank dialogue with Russia regarding its ambitions [...] Where cooperation with Russia based on common interest is possible such as reducing the global threat of terrorism, we ought to explore these options. Where important differences remain, we should be steadfast in defending the interests of America and her allies. Russia must know that we will be accountable to our commitments and those of our allies and that Russia must be held to account for its actions”. Tillerson further stated that the Obama administration’s response to Russia’s annexation of Crimea in 2014 was seen by Moscow as “a weak response” and, if he had been in office, he would have recommended the provision of arms and intelligence to the Ukrainian government.

## Assessments

Concerns regarding Tillerson’s relationship with Putin and his attitude toward Russia are particularly sensitive given ever increasing evidence that Russia was directly involved in election-related hacking. This is, indeed, one of the primary concerns with his appointment, namely, that Tillerson will be unable or unwilling to separate the interests of his former company from that of the State Department. However, in his confirmation hearings, concrete efforts were undertaken by both the nominee and supporters to separate Tillerson as ExxonMobil CEO and Tillerson as Secretary of State. At the same time, he spent his entire career at that company, which most certainly helped shape his views of global business and political affairs. It may be difficult to divorce himself mentally from the company’s interests, even if he did so financially and states that he intends to professionally. At the same time, Trump’s preference for Tillerson stems from his business acumen, meaning that the president may want him to preserve the mentality of a CEO rather than adopt that of a diplomat.

In addition, should Tillerson support improved relations with Russia, he is liable to, like [Flynn](#), come into conflict with elements of Trump’s cabinet that do not hold a favourable view of Moscow, including [Pompeo](#), [Mattis](#), and [Coats](#), as well as Vice President Elect Pence.

It is also difficult to assess how Tillerson’s appointment would affect foreign policy, given his lack of government or military experience. This means that, aside from his positions regarding sanctions while at ExxonMobil, his views on other pertinent issues can be based, thus far, on only his confirmation hearings and other statements made since his nomination. Tillerson’s extensive background in business, however, is likely precisely the reason that he was chosen by Trump. In other words, Trump’s calls to renegotiate everything from defence relationships with allies to the nuclear agreement with Iran to the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) suggests that he was specifically looking for an individual capable of deal-making to lead the State Department. It is also perhaps worthwhile to note that Tillerson’s management of a company the size of Exxon means that he will likely face little difficulties when transitioning to the head of a department as large as State.

## Senior Adviser – Jared Kushner



### Profile

Jared Kushner is Trump's 35-year-old son-in-law who wed his daughter Ivanka in 2009 in a Jewish ceremony. Jared and Ivanka being Jewish, along with their three children, is often cited as proof of the impossibility of Trump being anti-Semitic. Kushner has also publicly denied this, including in a [piece he wrote](#) in his newspaper, the *Observer*.

Kushner graduated with a BA in sociology from Harvard University in 2003 and then from New York University with a dual JD and MBA in 2007. Author Daniel Golden has [claimed](#) that his acceptance into both may have been connected to connections with and large donations made to each school by his father, Charlie Kushner (hereafter "Charlie", while Jared will remain "Kushner"). Charlie, however, found himself imprisoned in 2004 after negotiating a plea deal regarding tax evasion, illegal campaign donations, and witness tampering.

During that time, Kushner found himself finishing his MBA and JD, acting as publisher at the *Observer*, which he had purchased in 2006, and involved with Kushner Companies, although he was not named as CEO until 2008. [Self-described](#) as a "diversified real estate organisation", this is the Kushner family business that was founded by Charlie in 1985. According to [Forbes](#), Kushner, his brother Josh, and his parents have an estimated fortune worth 1.8 billion USD. Kushner's lawyer, however, [reportedly stated](#) that he is divesting "significant assets", resigning from Kushner Companies, and will recuse himself on certain issues. There are [reports](#), for example, that he is attempting to sell the *Observer*. He is also not expected to take a salary for the position of senior adviser. This is all likely as part of efforts to avoid anti-nepotism laws and conflicts of interest.

As demonstrated by his background, Kushner has no government, military, or policy experience. When it comes to politics, the only experience that he can claim is the role that he played in Trump's campaign, which should not be underestimated. He has often been described as one of Trump's main advisers, having his ear and trust, with articles citing Kushner's consistency [in comparison](#) to the President Elect's three campaign managers. According to entrepreneur Peter Thiel, "if Trump was the CEO, Jared was effectively the chief operating officer". He was quoted by Steven Bertoni of Forbes, who [wrote an article](#) detailing what he describes as Kushner's gradual ascent, ultimately becoming the man who "won Trump the White House".

Given Kushner's lack of experience, as well as the fact that he gives interviews only rarely, understanding where he specifically falls on certain positions (i.e. how he might advise Trump with regard to the Iran deal, Gulf allies, etc.) is unknown. Trump did, however, previously state in an interview with *The New York Times* that he may [play a role](#) with regard to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

### Assessments

Kushner is another controversial appointee, primarily due to his familial relationship with Trump and concerns regarding nepotism. In fact, a group of Democrats wrote a letter [calling](#) for the Department of Justice to review Kushner's role in relation to anti-nepotism laws and conflicts of interest. That said, even if Kushner's appointment is deemed to be in violation of these laws, it doesn't change the fact that no one can prevent Trump from looking to Kushner for advice if he so desires. This means that Kushner is liable to be an adviser regardless: Prior to the appointment, Kushner accompanied Trump

on his first White House visit and walked with Obama's Chief of Staff. He and his wife are also slated to move to Washington, DC.

Given his background--both he and his father, for example, have donated to Democratic candidates in the past--it is possible that Kushner will serve as a more moderate voice. He reportedly attempted to assuage concerns from the business community regarding a Trump presidency and had an influence in the "centrist tilt of Trump's economic team", which is considered centrist because it includes multiple individuals from places like Goldman Sachs. He also reportedly preferred Mitt Romney as Secretary of State and then, when he was out of the running, Tillerson over John Bolton and Rudy Giuliani.

## UN Ambassador – Nimrata “Nikki” Haley



### Profile

Nimrata “Nikki” Haley is the current governor of South Carolina and former member of that state’s House of Representatives, serving from 2005 until her election as governor. She is South Carolina’s first female governor and only the second Indian-American governor in the United States. Her parents are immigrants and Sikhs who came to the US after her father accepted a position as professor at Voorhees College. Before Haley attended and graduated from Clemson University with a degree in accounting, she began working—at age 13—for the family business, an upscale women’s clothing store called Exotica International. She returned to the company, which ultimately became a multi-million dollar company, as CFO after a stint as account supervisor for a recycling company following graduation.

In 1998, Haley served on the board of directors for the Orangeburg County Chamber of Commerce and then, in 2003, for the Lexington Chamber of Commerce. The following year, she became president of the National Association of Women Business Owners and won the aforementioned election to the South Carolina’s House of Representatives. Haley is considered a member of the Tea Party and gave the [Republican response](#) to the State of the Union address in January 2016.

Haley has no federal government or foreign policy experience, with the limited exception of [seven trade missions](#) she reportedly attended as governor that involved “negotiating with international companies seeking economic development deals in the state”. Although she has no record regarding key foreign policy and Middle East-related issues, she has publicly expressed her position on some:

- [Iran deal](#): Haley was one of 15 Republican governors who [sent a letter](#) to President Obama opposing the nuclear deal in September 2015. In addition to criticising the agreement, the letter explicitly stated that they would “ensure that the various state-level sanctions that are now in effect remain in effect” in defiance of the provision that the federal government would “actively encourage” the removal of state-level sanctions.
- [Attitude toward Islam](#): Haley [publicly criticised](#) Trump’s calls for a “Muslim ban”, calling it “absolutely un-American”. Although she [requested](#) that Syrian refugees not be settled in South Carolina due to accusations that the vetting process, which takes approximately two years, is insufficient. However, she was unable to successfully halt resettlement, and [several dozen](#) have been placed in the state.

In addition, like [Pompeo](#), Haley was not an early supporter of Trump and initially backed Rubio in the presidential primary. Trump responded to this endorsement by [calling her](#) “very, very weak on illegal immigration”. She also criticised him, for example, for failing to “[disavow the KKK](#)” and more forcefully condemn hate speech.

### Assessments

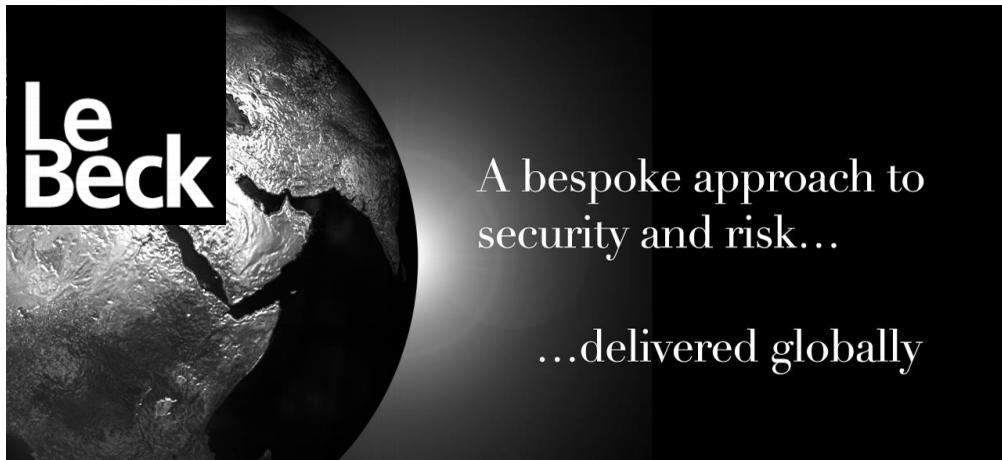
The major concern regarding Haley is her notable lack of foreign policy experience, with which the UN exclusively deals. Trade missions as governor is unlikely to have prepared her for the role although some have cited her executive experience as governor as suitable for the role of UN ambassador, which requires a lot of negotiating. In this context, she was notably praised for her handling of the June 2015 Charleston church shooting, after which she called for the removal of the Confederate flag

from the Statehouse despite opposition. However, while her political background means she's not going in blind, her lack of experience, including with regard to tough negotiations between the UN's permanent five members may be a serious disadvantage. For comparison purposes, Russia's ambassador, Vitaly Churkin, has held the position [since 2006](#). Moreover, the fact that many issues discussed at the UN may not be on Trump's radar, including events in sub-Saharan Africa, means that Haley may have notable leeway and, correspondingly, a relatively sharp learning curve.

Although Trump's position vis-a-vis Russia may mean that tough negotiations are more unlikely, at least at the start, and although Haley's position on Russia is unclear, the fact that she was a critic of Trump's may mean that she won't hesitate to argue (in private) against policy positions. Much like we assessed with regard to Pompeo, Trump's appointment of Haley's indicates that he doesn't hold a grudge with regard to her early criticism of him and will be open to hearing her out. However, it is very important to note that the influence that Haley will or won't hold as UN Ambassador is key. Major foreign policy decisions, likely excluding UN specific issues, are liable to be made at the White House between Trump and his key advisors and Secretaries. Although Haley will certainly have access to Trump, it seems unlikely that his New York-based ambassador to the UN will be his preferred counsel on most issues.

## Have any questions?

Contact us at [Info@LeBeckInternational.com](mailto:Info@LeBeckInternational.com).



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