



Trump's Cabinet Begins to Take Shape

By Roxanne Perugino

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On November 18, President-elect Donald Trump named three Cabinet positions, all of which are considered controversial to varying degrees: Lt. General Mike Flynn for National Security Advisor, Representative Mike Pompeo (R-Kansas) for CIA Director, and Senator Jeff Sessions (R-Alabama) for Attorney General. Flynn will not require Senate confirmation, but Pompeo and Sessions will.

Lt. General Mike Flynn to be National Security Advisor: The choice of Flynn as National Security Advisor is not without controversy. His supporters describe him as the best intelligence officer of his generation, while his critics deride him as an erratic right-wing zealot. There probably is some truth to both sides.

Flynn is a harsh critic of Muslim extremism and of the religion itself, calling “radical Islam” an existential threat to the United States. In a speech at an Act For America event in August 2016, Flynn said that Islam is not a religion, stating “Islam is a political ideology. It definitely hides behind this notion of it being a religion.” Flynn also told the audience that Islam is “like a malignant cancer, though in this case it has metastasized.”

In addition, in strident public comments, including an address at the Republican National Convention, Flynn claimed that ISIS militants pose a threat on a “global scale” and demanded that the US military campaign against the group be more aggressive. He has condemned US leaders who describe Islam as a religion of peace. Like the President-elect, he believes that the United States should sharply curtail immigration from Muslim-majority countries.

The role of National Security Advisor varies by administration, but it usually centers on coordinating the policy positions of the secretaries of state, defense, and justice and other members of a president's national security team. Therefore, it is important that Flynn establish a good working relationship with the yet-to-be-named Secretary of Defense and Secretary of State and avoid the “turf” battles of past administrations. Flynn will have direct access to President-elect Trump, therefore wielding significant influence on matters of war and peace as well as diplomacy and intelligence. For example, he has been successful in convincing Trump that the United States is in a “world war” with Islamist militants and must work with allies, including Russia, in the fight. Both Flynn and Trump firmly believe that Washington needs to start working with Moscow to defeat ISIS, despite Russian President Vladimir Putin's suppression of critics and his efforts to dismember Ukraine.

Flynn served for more than three decades in the Army following his commissioning in 1981 as a Second Lieutenant in military intelligence. His career included a stint as Director of Intelligence for the Joint Chiefs of Staff and Intelligence Chief for the US-led International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan. In 2012 he became head of the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) but was forced to resign in 2014 amid allegations that his management style was chaotic; fallout from the classified intelligence files leaked by former intelligence contractor Edward Snowden added to his troubles.

Representative Mike Pompeo (R-Kansas) to be CIA Director: Unlike Flynn, Pompeo would need to win Senate confirmation. A member of the Tea Party, Pompeo has been a harsh critic of President Obama's foreign policy, including the nuclear deal with Iran (the Joint Comprehensive Plan Of Action, or JCPOA) and would favor dismantling the agreement. He also supports keeping Guantanamo open, using torture against detainees, and expanding the government's electronic surveillance power.

Pompeo is not well known to the American public but is well-respected by his House colleagues and intelligence professionals. Representative Adam Schiff (D-California), the ranking Democrat on the House Intelligence Committee, has praised Pompeo as "bright and hard working."

However, Pompeo's hawkish views on national security matters, including his laser focus on the threat of "radical Islamic terrorism," reflect those of President-elect Trump and National Security Advisor-designate Flynn. He likely will not be a restraining influence on Trump, particularly with respect to controversial policies like torture and drone strikes. On the other hand, Pompeo's hawkish views toward Russia could potentially be a source of tension as both Trump and Flynn support developing closer ties with Russia.

Pompeo is likely to be confirmed for the position of CIA Director. The intelligence community views Pompeo's nomination as improving the relationship between the CIA and Congress, one that has deteriorated in recent years over the Agency's detainee program and battles with the members of Congress who oversee the Agency.

Pompeo graduated first in his class from the US Military Academy and served as a tank commander in Germany at the end of the Cold War. He left the military with the rank of Captain in 1991. He earned a law degree from Harvard, worked as a lawyer, then moved into the business world, where he founded a company called Thayer Aerospace. He won a seat in Congress in 2011. Pompeo has been a member of the House Intelligence Committee since the 113th Congress.

Senator Jeff Sessions (R-Alabama) to be Attorney General: Without a doubt, the Sessions nomination is the most controversial so far.

Sessions's nomination has been welcomed by his fellow Republican senators. He will need to be approved by the Senate Judiciary Committee before confirmation before the full Senate. In 1986, Sessions was denied a federal judgeship over allegations he was soft on the Ku Klux Klan and his

strong opposition to the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU). Sessions has denied these claims.

Despite Sessions's denials, Democratic opposition to Sessions is growing, indicating a contentious confirmation process. People for the American Way (PFAW) opposed the choice of Sessions, citing his long history of racially insensitive remarks and an abysmal record on civil rights. Incoming Senator Minority Leader Senator Charles Schumer (D-New York) has vowed a tough vetting process but declined to make any quick judgment on the nomination. Still, several Senate Democrats, including Senator Elizabeth Warren (D-Massachusetts), have called on President-elect Trump to withdraw Session's nomination, while other Democrats have been less quick to react, promising a fair but thorough vetting. Although House members do not have the responsibility of confirming presidential nominees, Democrats on the House Judiciary Committee have come out against the Sessions nomination, a position that further demonstrates Democratic opposition against Sessions.

Those Democrats who oppose Sessions's nomination are unlikely to succeed. Due to rule changes made when the Democrats had control of the Senate, only 51 votes are needed to confirm a Cabinet nominee, instead of the previous threshold of 60 votes. The current make up in the Senate is 52 Republicans and 48 Democrats, depending on the results of the Louisiana run-off in December. So far Sessions has the backing of all Senate Republicans. There also will be political pressure on Democrats to back Sessions. Twenty-three Democrats and two Independents will be up for reelection in 2018; several of these senators are from states President-elect Trump won, so a vote against the President's nominee could hurt their reelection chances.

Other Contenders

Secretary of State: Former New York Mayor Rudy Giuliani has been mentioned as a possible nominee for Secretary of State, a move that is sure to draw objections from both Democrats and Republicans. Giuliani has no qualifications for Secretary of State, nor does he (or Trump) understand the nuances of foreign policy. Another name mentioned is John Bolton, the former US Ambassador to the United Nations and a neocon poster-boy, whose hawkish views are sure to rankle more moderate senators. Both Giuliani and Bolton would encounter significant opposition to their confirmation.

Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairman Bob Corker (R-Tennessee) also has been mentioned and certainly would be more acceptable to the Senate, provided Corker wants to be associated with a Trump Administration. Former Massachusetts Governor and 2012 Republican presidential candidate Mitt Romney met with Trump over the weekend, but both Trump and Romney claim no offer was made. Still, insiders believe that Romney may in fact be in the running. According to reliable sources, Council on Foreign Relations President Richard Haass is still under

consideration. Corker, Romney, and Haass would be far more palatable to the foreign policy establishment than Giuliani and Bolton.

Secretary of Defense: Retired Marine Gen. James Mattis appears to have the edge to be President-elect Trump's pick for Secretary of Defense, although the Trump camp has not made any statement to this effect. Mattis, the former US CENTCOM commander, has been praised by Senator John McCain (R-Arizona) as "one of the finest military officers of his generation." There is one potential roadblock to Mattis's confirmation: current law prohibits military officers from becoming the civilian leader of the military until seven years after they have left the service. In order for Mattis to become Defense Secretary, therefore, Congress would have to pass new legislation allowing an exception to the law. Reportedly, work is underway to amend the language.

There is, however, some concern from Israel and its supporters about Mattis's potential nomination. In 2013, at an Aspen Institute conference, Mattis warned that Israeli settlements on the West Bank were liable to turn Israel into an apartheid state. His statement has caused concern for the Zionist Organization of America (ZOA), which called his comments "hostile to Israel." Mattis's position on the Iran nuclear agreement (JCPOA) also worries Israel and its supporters. Mattis opposed the JCPOA but since its signing he has advocated acceptance of the agreement. His comments on the Iran deal, made at the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) last spring, are in direct contrast to President-elect Trump's claims that he would renege on or renegotiate the agreement.

Other names under consideration for Defense Secretary are former President George W. Bush's National Security Advisor, Stephen Hadley, and Senator Tom Cotton (R-Arkansas). Senator Kelly Ayotte (R-New Hampshire) also has been mentioned--although considered a long-shot if nominated, she would be the first female Secretary of Defense in US history.