



## Diplomacy and President Elect Donald Trump

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President Elect Donald Trump will be sworn in as the President of the United States on 20<sup>th</sup> January 2017. He has time and again mentioned that he will change some of the major policy decisions taken by President Barack Obama and his administration, especially with respect to trade negotiations, the Iran deal, relations with Russia and China, terrorism etc. Nonetheless, he has not elaborated on his plans to bring about this change or the replacement policies that he shall implement. In fact, he held his first press after winning the election on 11 January 2017. (The last time Mr. Trump held a news conference was on the third day of the Democratic convention, July 27, 2016.)<sup>1</sup> During his press conference he did answer questions on relations with Russia and also future relations with Mexico.<sup>2</sup>

Mr. Trump has repeatedly issued announcements and proposals over social media platforms such as Twitter, during both the presidential elections and the transition period, embracing the medium as a superior means of communicating with the American people compared to relying on traditional media organizations.<sup>3</sup> Mr. Trump used his social media account during the campaign to undermine his rivals. Post his election he used has used the platform, to denounce reports of problems in his transition team as well as proving a glimpse into his thoughts on international events. While the popularity of the medium and the reach that it provides the President Elect is large, critics point out, 140 characters<sup>4</sup> is not enough to express views on critical issues. They feel that it causes more confusion rather than help in strengthening relations. Critics state that hardcore diplomacy and diplomatic posturing and signalling, are delicate balancing acts that require the use of words carefully. Mr. Trump's aggressive tweets, especially with regards to China have, according to some, created uncertainty within the relationship. South Korea has created a new position in its foreign ministry solely to monitor Donald Trump's tweets as it attempts to divine the US president-elect's policies in volatile Korean peninsula.<sup>5</sup> Reacting to the criticism, Mr. Trump in his interview to The Times (UK) and German newspaper Bild "insisted

that he was determined to keep tweeting when he enters the White House. “the tweeting is interesting because I find it very accurate — when I get a word out and if I tell something to the papers and they don’t write it accurately, it’s really bad — they can’t do much when you tweet it and I’m careful about, it’s very precise, actually it’s very, very precise.”<sup>6</sup>

This paper will take into consideration views expressed by Mr. Trump on some of the recent international topics through social media, his most recent press conference and other interview to The Time (UK) and Bild (Germany).<sup>7</sup>

## **Russia**

Mr. Trump has time and again stated that he would improve relations between the two countries. He has praised President Vladimir Putin’s leadership skills and in his interview to The Times (UK) and Bild (Germany) he stated that he would start his tenure as President by placing his trust on President Putin. “Having a good relationship with Russia is a good thing, not a bad thing. Only “stupid” people, or fools, would think that it is bad! We have enough problems around the world without yet another one. When I am President, Russia will respect us far more than they do now and both countries will, perhaps, work together to solve some of the many great and pressing problems and issues of the WORLD!” (Donald J. Trump @realDonaldTrump 07 Jan 2016). He stated during his 11 January 2017 press conference that while he was hopeful that the relationship with Russia would be cordial but he is prepared for continued friction.

He has expressed concern over the rise in the number of nuclear weapons. While pointing out that the US will maintain its nuclear arsenal, he said that he will be open to option that allow reduction in nuclear weapons. With respect to Russia, he stated that if President Putin agrees to nuclear reduction, then his administration would be willing to consider lifting US sanctions. “They have sanctions on Russia — let’s see if we can make some good deals with Russia. For one thing, I think nuclear weapons should be way down and reduced very substantially, that’s part of it.”

He has been critical and called as “ridiculous” US intelligence agencies assessment that Russian hackers were likely to have interfered in the US presidential election to tilt the contest in Mr. Trump’s favour. In his twitter posts he has questioned the delay by the White House in making the cyber acts public after the elections and not before. During his recent press conference he stated that he was an asset not a liability when it came to developing relations with Russia and that under his presidency the US would have better defence against hacking. He also stated that he was proud of the intelligence community but was upset that classified information, which was being discussed with him, was being leaked to the media. This was in reference to reports by CNN and Buzzfeed that published reports that Russia has compromising information on Mr. Trump and undermined the election process to help him win the elections.

He was -critical of Russia's intervention in Syria, however, -describing it as "a very bad thing" that had led to a "terrible -humanitarian situation". However, he is hopeful Russia and the US can work together to fight the ISIL.

## China

The Global Times, an English language newspaper, in a series of opinion pieces has written about the 'aggressive' actions of the incoming President. In a series of op-ed articles it has criticised the appointed 'China hawk' Peter Navarro as head of the new National Trade Council, which he stated is "...regarded as a signal that he (President Elect Trump) will take more aggressive action to promote American interest first agenda. It is likely that the US will adopt reckless trade protectionist policies in the future..."<sup>8</sup> Mr. Trump has been consistent on his views that he will re-negotiate trade agreements with China. He also hinted at a possible different approach to the South China Sea dispute through his tweet, "Did China ask us if it was OK to devalue their currency (making it hard for our companies to compete), heavily tax our products going into their country (the U.S. doesn't tax them) or to build a massive military complex in the middle of the South China Sea? I don't think so!" (Donald J. Trump @realDonaldTrump 05 Dec 2016).

In a series of tweets expressing his views on the incident of China seizing an US drone he stated that, "China steals United States Navy research drone in international waters - rips it out of water and takes it to China in unprecedented act." Further adding We should tell China that we don't want the drone they stole back.- let them keep it!" (Donald J. Trump @realDonaldTrump 17 &18 Dec 2016).

The Global Times in another op-ed article has also spoken about Mr. Trump's tweets on North Korea and China relations stating that, "Trump's tweets reflect his twisted view of North Korea's nuclear issue which holds that China is to blame for North Korea's reluctance to give up its nuclear ambitions; as long as Beijing offers no aid to Pyongyang, the latter will abandon its nuclear program sooner or later." It was with reference to two tweets by the President Elect stating, "North Korea just stated that it is in the final stages of developing a nuclear weapon capable of reaching parts of the US. It won't happen!" Later he added another, "China has been taking out massive amounts of money & wealth from the US in totally one-sided trade, but won't help with North Korea. Nice!" (Donald J. Trump @realDonaldTrump 03 Jan 2017). Underlining China's stand the article elaborated that, "China firmly opposes North Korea's pursuit of nuclear weapons. When North Korea violated the resolutions of the UN Security Council, China imposed sanctions. But the sanctions are aimed at curbing Pyongyang's nuclear and missile development capabilities rather than creating a humanitarian crisis or overthrowing its regime."<sup>9</sup>

Mr. Trump also broke with nearly four decades of US diplomatic practise when he had spoken with the Taiwanese president, Tsai Ing-wen, "who offered her congratulations." He is believed to be the first president or president-elect who has spoken to a Taiwanese leader since at

least 1979, when the US severed diplomatic ties with Taiwan as part of its recognition of the People's Republic of China. While tweeted, "The President of Taiwan CALLED ME today to wish me, congratulations on winning the Presidency. Thank you!" and "Interesting how the U.S. sells Taiwan billions of dollars of military equipment but I should not accept a congratulatory call." (Donald J. Trump @realDonaldTrump 03 Dec 2016). Many experts have stated that it is unlikely that the Taiwanese leader would have made the call without arranging it in advance.<sup>10</sup>

Mr. Trump's views that, "The United States must greatly strengthen and expand its nuclear capability until such time as the world comes to its senses regarding nukes." (Donald J. Trump @realDonaldTrump 22 Dec 2016), also gathered reaction. It was proposed that, "China's nuclear weapons must be "sufficient" to deter the US when it flexes its military muscle, as well as to convince the US that the PLA will strike back without hesitation in face of military provocation. The US and its allies need to believe that whichever of their Asian-Pacific military bases are used for launching attacks on China, it will meet destructive retaliation."<sup>11</sup>

## Israel

On 23 December 2016, United Nations Security Council passed resolution 2334, by a vote of 14-0 with the US abstaining. The resolution describes Israel's settlements in the West Bank and East Jerusalem as illegal and an obstacle to peace with the Palestinians. It was the first time US President Obama declined to block a Security Council resolution that Israel considered hostile. The vote and the US decision to abstain was criticised by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. The two leaders have also expressed opposing views on the Iran nuclear deal. In response to the resolution, Mr. Trump said, who has also been critical of the Iran nuclear deal and has expressed support for Israel, "At the UN, things will be different after Jan 20th." He further criticised President Obama and stated, "The resolution being considered at the United Nations Security Council regarding Israel should be vetoed. As the United States has long maintained, peace between the Israelis and the Palestinians will only come through direct negotiations between the parties, and not through the imposition of terms by the United Nations. This puts Israel in a very poor negotiating position and is extremely unfair to all Israelis." In the days that followed he tweeted that, "We cannot continue to let Israel be treated with such total disdain and disrespect. They used to have a great friend in the U.S., but not anymore. The beginning of the end was the horrible Iran deal, and now this (U.N.)! Stay strong Israel, January 20th is fast approaching!" He also was critical of the UN saying that it was a "The big loss yesterday for Israel in the United Nations will make it much harder to negotiate peace. Too bad, but we will get it done anyway!" and "The United Nations has such great potential but right now it is just a club for people to get together, talk and have a good time. So sad!" (Donald J. Trump @realDonaldTrump 22-28 Dec 2016).

Mr Trump also confirmed that he would appoint Jared Kushner, his son-in-law, to broker a Middle East peace deal.<sup>12</sup>

## Britain

In an interview to The Times (15 January 2017), Mr. Trump stated that he loved the UK and would work with Prime Minister Theresa May. Mr Trump said he thought that “Brexit is going to end up being a great thing” and -welcomed the fall in the value of the pound for having helped to boost the attractiveness of British products abroad.<sup>13</sup>

He stated that he would be meeting Prime Minister May right after he occupied the White House. He also expressed hope that the UK would veto any UN Security Council Resolution with the US against Israel. He further said that the UK and the US will have a strong trade deal soon.

## Europe

During his interview to both The Times (UK) and Bild (Germany) he was far less warm towards the EU and said he understood completely the sentiment behind the Leave campaign which, he believed, was largely driven by immigration. “I do believe this, if they [EU countries] hadn’t been forced to take in all of the refugees, so many, with all the -problems that it . . . entails, I think that you wouldn’t have a Brexit. It probably could have worked out but this was the final straw, this was the final straw that broke the camel’s back. “I think people want . . . their own identity, so if you ask me . . . I believe others will leave.” And while he feels that the coming years may be tough for the European Union, he feels for the US it doesn’t matter if the European Union remains strong together or is separate.<sup>14</sup>

He was also less warm about Mrs Merkel despite saying he had “great respect” for the German leader. “I think she made one very catastrophic mistake and that was taking all of these illegals, you know, taking all of the people from wherever they come from,” he said. “And nobody even knows where they come from. So I think she made a catastrophic mistake, very bad mistake.”<sup>15</sup> He stated that instead of allowing the refugees to come to Europe and Germany, safe zones should have been built in Syria. Admitting that this solution would be more expensive he stated that the Gulf State should contribute to the building of safe zones in Syria.

Nonetheless, he stated that, “Merkel is by far one of the most important leaders. ‘Cause you look at the UK and you look at the European Union and it’s Germany. Basically a vehicle for Germany.” And Germany would be the country that the US would look to when it wants to ‘talk’ to someone in Europe.<sup>16</sup>

On relations with Eastern Europe, he has stated that he understands the fears that the countries of the region have with respect to Russia and President Putin. He stated that these countries are not paying their fair share in the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), an issue that will be addressed under his presidency. The other reason is that NATO as an organisation has become obsolete as it does not deal with menace of terrorism. However, he

stressed that, “NATO was very important to him”<sup>17</sup> and that he feels very strongly towards Europe, indicating perhaps that the American security guarantee would continue to be maintained at present levels.

## **Terrorism**

On being asked what his priority as Commander in Chief was, Mr Trump said ISIS. However, he refused to elaborate on how he would defeat or destroy the terrorist group. He feels that the present administration made a mistake by making public their plans to recapture Mosul and other areas.

Mr. Trump has been critical of US policy towards Iraq. He stated that, “ It was one of the worst decisions, possibly the worst decision ever made in the history of our country. We’ve unleashed — it’s like throwing rocks into a beehive. It’s one of the great messes of all time.” On Afghanistan he expressed similar views saying, “Afghanistan is, is not going well. Nothing’s going well — I guess we’ve been in Afghanistan almost 17 years — but you look at all of the places, now in all fairness, we haven’t let our people do what they’re supposed to do.”<sup>18</sup>

In expressing his solidarity with the victims of terror attacks across Europe he tweeted, that, “Today there were terror attacks in Turkey, Switzerland and Germany - and it is only getting worse. The civilized world must change thinking!” He further said, “The terrorist who killed so many people in Germany said just before crime, “by God's will we will slaughter you pigs, I swear, we will slaughter you. This is a purely religious threat, which turned into reality. Such hatred! When will the U.S., and all countries, fight back?” (Donald J. Trump @realDonaldTrump 20-24 Dec 2016). Security analysis’s are worried that the vocal stand of Mr. Trump especially his views on use of torture, the possibility of a national registry for Muslims, restriction of immigrants from Muslim majority nations or from the Middle East may be used by radical groups in their propaganda materials. In his interview to The Time (UK) and Bild (Germnay) he stated that, “We (Trump administration) don’t want people coming in from Syria who we don’t know who they are. You know there’s no way of vetting these people. I don’t want to do what Germany did.”<sup>19</sup> He endorsed his views that there would be ‘extreme’ vetting of muslims who want to enter the US. He further stated that he won the election because he proposed building strong borders and better trade policies. In such a situation if need be his administration could look at imposing travel restrictions on people from other parts of the world, including Europe.

Mr. Trump has also made it clear that unlike his predecessor he is not in favour of closing down the prison in Guantanamo Bay. There should be no further releases from Gitmo. These are extremely dangerous people and should not be allowed back onto the battlefield. (Donald J. Trump @realDonaldTrump Jan 3 2017). The statement comes as the Obama administration prepares to release another 19 detainees from the facility before the president leaves office. Currently, there are 59 detainees at the prison, including four people who also have been cleared

for release by an interagency review board but are not a part of the group of 19 and could remain detained there indefinitely. Their names have not been released. The remaining detainees include about 10 who have been charged in military commissions, including five accused of orchestrating the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks. There also is a group of what are known as “forever prisoners,” who the U.S. government maintains must remain in custody because of the continuing threat they pose but who cannot be tried because of a lack of court-worthy evidence.<sup>20</sup>

## Conclusion

Both Mr. Trump and his incoming press secretary, Mr. Sean Spicer, have made it clear that the President Elect would continue to use personal social media accounts even after Mr. Trump takes charge of the administration. The Republican Party members both elected and non-elected would have to ensure that the Mr. Trump’s interactions add to the Presidency and bring forth the changes that he has promised, after eight years of Democratic Party administration.

Mr. Trump has announced the names of the men and women who would constitute his cabinet and there are indications that the US Congress, dominated by the Republicans, will confirm them without much problem. While members of his cabinet now start to elaborate on the foreign policy of the new administration, Mr. Trump through his interactions , predominantly via social media but also through the press, has started to indicate the priority areas for the Presidency.

The critics feel that his ‘aggressive’ views has caused confusion and may cause diplomatic un-pleasantries that would be counter-productive for future relations. The President Elect has indicated that social media platforms allow him to reach out to his voters and provide them with accurate views. In the coming days as the administration take charge, it will elaborate on the direction of US foreign policy through official mediums. It is likely that Mr. Trump will continue to express his views through his official social media accounts, perhaps with less frequency. Nonetheless, his interactions have provided a fair indication of his possible foreign policy trajectory.

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Disclaimer: Views expressed are of authors and do not reflect the views of the Council.*

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Philip Bump, “It looks like Trump’s midsummer press conference may have been his last one this year,” [https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2016/11/22/heres-how-long-it-has-been-since-donald-trumps-last-press-conference/?utm\\_term=.95a30682a177](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2016/11/22/heres-how-long-it-has-been-since-donald-trumps-last-press-conference/?utm_term=.95a30682a177), Accessed on 11 January 2017.

<sup>2</sup> The Transcript of the press conference is available at [https://www.nytimes.com/2017/01/11/us/politics/trump-press-conference-transcript.html?\\_r=0](https://www.nytimes.com/2017/01/11/us/politics/trump-press-conference-transcript.html?_r=0)

- <sup>3</sup> The Atlantic, “The Trump Tweet Tracker,” <https://www.theatlantic.com/liveblogs/2016/12/donald-trump-twitter/511619/>, Accessed on 11 January 2017.
- <sup>4</sup> Twitter has a word limit of 140 characters per tweet.
- <sup>5</sup> Julian Ryall, “Twitter diplomacy: South Korea appoints officer to monitor Donald Trump’s tweets for foreign policy insights,” <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2017/01/05/twitter-diplomacy-south-korea-appoints-officer-monitor-donald/>, Accessed on 11 January 2017.
- <sup>6</sup> The Times, “Full transcript of interview with Donald Trump,” <http://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/full-transcript-of-interview-with-donald-trump-5d39sro9d>, Accessed on 17 January 2017.
- <sup>7</sup> The tweets mentioned in this article have been taken from <https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump>. Tweets are as accessed on 10 January 2017.
- <sup>8</sup> Global Times, “Trump’s Navarro nomination may raise risk of Sino-US conflict,” <http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1025202.shtml>, Accessed on 10 January 2017.
- <sup>9</sup> Global Times, “Is Trump coercing China with North Korean nuclear issue?,” <http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1026989.shtml>, Accessed on 11 January 2017.
- <sup>10</sup> Mark Landler and David E. Sanger, “Trump Speaks With Taiwan’s Leader, an Affront to China,” <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/12/02/us/politics/trump-speaks-with-taiwans-leader-a-possible-affront-to-china.html>, Accessed on 11 January 2017.
- <sup>11</sup> Global Times, “China cannot hesitate on nuclear buildup,” <http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1025377.shtml>, Accessed on 11 January 2017.
- <sup>12</sup> Michael Gove, “Donald Trump: I’ll do a deal with Britain,” <http://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/donald-trump-interview-brexiteer-uk-trade-deal-theresa-may-phthbjmhw>, Accessed on 16 January 2017.
- <sup>13</sup> Op.Cit o6, The Times.
- <sup>14</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>15</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>16</sup> Ibid
- <sup>17</sup> Ibid
- <sup>18</sup> Op.Cit o6, The Times.
- <sup>19</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>20</sup> Dan Lamothe, “Trump says no more detainees should be released from Guantanamo Bay prison,” <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/checkpoint/wp/2017/01/03/trump-says-no-more-detainees-should-be-released-from-guantanamo-bay-prison/>, Accessed on 11 January 2017.