

Trump's Dismissal of his Foreign Minister and its Impact on America's Foreign Policy

By: Dr. Abdullah Robin*

President Trump dismissed his secretary of state, Rex Tillerson, by a twitter message on the 13th of March and announced CIA director Mike Pompeo as his replacement. Then, just hours after Tillerson was fired, Steve Goldstein, the State Department's undersecretary of public affairs was also fired by the White House for publicly contradicting the White House's account of Tillerson's removal, and reporters were called to the White House on the 16th of March to be told by the Chief of Staff that Tillerson was informed of his dismissal "while he was sitting on a toilet in Africa suffering from a stomach infection." Tillerson's humiliation by the White House follows months of disagreements and speculation in which Tillerson refused to deny that he had called Trump a 'moron'! However, personal differences are not the only reason for replacing Tillerson as Secretary of State.

A CNBC report suggested that a difference over policy to Russia might be the reason, as the day before he was fired, "Tillerson diverged from White House by saying poison used on an ex-spy in the UK 'came from Russia.'" However, other White House officials, and government departments, have also diverged from Trump on Russia. Furthermore, Trump's choice to replace Tillerson regularly adopts tougher rhetoric on Russia: "we need to continue to push back against the Russians everywhere we find them," Pompeo has said.

An article in 'Voice of America' on the 16th of March pointed to the effect of the change on China policy, with the headline title: "Change in Secretary of State Restarts US Diplomacy in Disputed South China Sea." The writer quoted regional experts to support the view that Tillerson had not been effective in demonstrating US diplomatic leadership in the South China Sea: "Right now, the Pentagon is running our policy, which is problematic because there are no military solutions to the (maritime) disputes, and the Pentagon ... can't succeed without a larger diplomatic strategy" said Gregory Poling, director of the Asia Maritime Transparency Institute. This theory got some support the next day when Trump signed legislation to improve relations with Taiwan, which China views as an illegitimate break-away province. The Chinese responded with harsh words: "We urge the U.S. side to correct its mistake, stop official exchanges between U.S. and Taiwan officials and substantively raising relations, and prudently and appropriately handle the Taiwan issue to avoid causing serious harm to Sino-U.S. ties and peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait region."

The new Secretary of State is considered a 'hawk' towards both Russia and China, but his most extreme policy inclinations, which are aligned with Trump's, are towards North Korea and Iran. Just two days before he was named as the new Secretary of State, he was very ambitious about Donald Trump's upcoming summit with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un. "The previous administration was negotiating from a position of weakness. This administration will be negotiating from a position of enormous strength," he said on CBS's *Face the Nation* programme, and is seeking the "complete, verifiable, irreversible denuclearization of North Korea." As for Iran, he has suggested bombing Iran's nuclear reactors and has criticized the Obama administration harshly for failing to take "advantage of crushing economic sanctions to end Iran's nuclear program," when the deal was struck. "That's not foreign policy; it's surrender."

As for the Middle East, Pompeo is an ultra-conservative who has criticized Obama for not doing enough to preserve Judeo Christian values in the face of threats from Islam.

Pompeo is an obvious choice for the ultra-conservative 'tea party' faction that is Trump's major funder and support within the Republican Party. Prior to his becoming CIA Director in 2017, he had been a Republican House of Representatives member for six years and served on the House Committee on Energy and Commerce, the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, and the Select Committee on Benghazi. In this time, he received more funding from the ultra-conservative Koch industries than other politician in history. The organization 'Open Democracy' tabulated (tweet: 18th of November, 2016) contributions that exceeded \$900,000 from the Kochs and their industries and think tanks. Furthermore, the Koch's, the Heritage Foundation's Asian Studies Center published an affirmation of Pompeo's appointment 2 days after the announcement was made saying that Pompeo had the distinction of being able to work well with both congress and the president and that: "America's national interests will not change. The way the United States goes about securing them—U.S. foreign policy—will."

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