

Turkey: Russia agrees US should attend Syria talks

AFP, 13.01.2017



Russia has agreed that the United States should be involved in talks on Syria's political future slated to take place in the Kazakh capital of Astana later this month, Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu said.

"The United States should definitely be invited, and that is what we agreed with Russia," Çavuşoğlu told journalists in Geneva after an international conference on Cyprus island. The talks in Astana are expected to take place. Russia and Turkey last month brokered a cease-fire in the war-torn country, but without the involvement of the U.S., a negotiator in previous cease-fires that had failed to hold.

The truce went into effect on Dec. 30, 2016, and has brought calm to much of Syria although fighting continues in some areas. "We need to maintain the cease-fire," Çavuşoğlu said in Geneva. "This is essential for the Astana talks."

He said invitations for the talks were likely to be sent out next week, adding that Washington should be present. "Nobody can ignore the role of the United States. And this is a principled position of Turkey," he said. "The ones who did or who could contribute should be there, but not just to be in the family photo. You know what I mean." He said the aim of the talks is to reach a "political solution, which is the best solution."

Erdoğan hopes for speedy progress in Turkey-US ties under Trump

Hurriyet Daily News, 09.01.2017



President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has admitted strains in ties between Turkey and the United States, while calling on U.S. President-elect Donald Trump to contribute to progress in relations.

“We are passing through a very sensitive period in our ties,” Erdoğan said, blasting the Obama administration’s “wrong choices” in the fight against ISIL in Syria. “We want to see the U.S. siding with us against terrorism in a strong, devoted manner. I believe we will sort these out through dialogue with the Trump administration after Jan. 20. I am sure we will make progress quickly,” he added.

“I believe we will reach a unity of understanding with Mr. Trump, particularly in regional issues, and make progress,” Erdoğan said. Turkey wants the United States to extradite the Pennsylvania-based Islamic preacher Fethullah Gülen, the alleged mastermind of the failed July 2016 coup attempt, while also ceasing cooperation with the Syrian Democratic Union Party (PYD) due to its links with the outlawed Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK).

EU Minister Çelik: Turkey’s anti-terror fight protects Europe, NATO states

Anadolu Agency, 12.01.2017



Turkey’s fight against terrorism in Syria as part of its ongoing Euphrates Shield operation protects the borders of Europe and NATO states, Turkey’s EU Minister Ömer Çelik said.

Speaking at a joint press conference in Ankara following a meeting with Finnish Foreign Minister Timo Soini, Çelik commented on the Euphrates Shield operation. “Turkey’s fight against terrorism is for the protection of the borders of the Turkish Republic as well as Europe and NATO,” he said. He also pointed out to the lack of adequate support from Turkey’s allies in its fight against the ISIL in Syria despite hard times they faced in the wake of a “heinous coup bid.”

The Turkey-led Euphrates Shield operation began in Syria in late August 2016 to improve security, support U.S.-led coalition forces against ISIL, and eliminate the terror threat along the Turkish border using Free Syrian Army (FSA) fighters backed by Turkish artillery and jets.

“If we are determined to share democratic values, nowadays, to advocate democracy is to stand by Turkey. Today, advocating democracy means backing Turkey in fighting against coup plotters and terror organizations,” Çelik said, referring to the failed coup attempt on July 15, 2016.

The minister underlined Turkey’s fight against terrorist organizations, including ISIL, the Fethullahist Terrorist Organization (FETÖ), which the Turkish government accuses of orchestrating the failed coup attempt, and the outlawed Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK), with which it has been in armed clashes since the mid-1980s.

Soini said Finland was supporting Turkey’s EU membership bid, adding that continuing negotiations with Turkey was a process that would benefit both sides. Çelik thanked the Finnish minister for his country’s solidarity with Turkey in the fight against terrorism. Soini later met Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and Prime Minister Binali Yıldırım as part of his official visit.

Ankara and Baghdad to focus on positive agenda

Hurriyet Daily News, 04.01.2017



Ankara and Baghdad have decided to focus on a positive agenda instead of disagreeing during a visit that aims to overcome earlier tensions and find momentum in areas of potential cooperation.

PM Yıldırım and PM Haider al-Abadi, will state a joint declaration which will highlight cooperation in energy and trade following. A Turkish delegation visited Baghdad and proposed that the Bashiqa military camp, which has caused tension since 2015 because Turkey deployed hundreds of troops to train local fighters, be named as a training center for anti-ISIL coalition under the monitoring of Baghdad.

“Consider that the camp is yours and that it has been allocated for the use of a coalition member,” a Turkish delegation member told Iraqi interlocutors, said the official. “Our soldiers in Bashiqa and our presence there has never aimed at Iraq’s sovereignty. We will say this in the meeting,” Yıldırım said.

Ankara also proposed renegotiating a deal for the Bashiqa camp one year later, a Turkish official, who wished to remain anonymous, told the Hürriyet Daily News. Turkey has pledged to withdraw its soldiers from Iraq when the threat posed by ISIL is eliminated. Iraq earlier proposed that Turkey put the camp under the control of Baghdad, but Ankara is concerned about security issues. The issue will be part of discussions between Yıldırım and al-Abadi, the official said.



However, al-Abadi asked for the inclusion of a remark in the joint declaration which will ease his position in front of the Iraqi public. Al-Abadi wants to include an expression which states, "Turkish Armed Forces (TSK) elements will leave Iraq when their function is completed."

The Turkish side has repeatedly reiterated that it will withdraw its troops when ISIL is defeated in Iraq. But Ankara is not willing to include any phrase addressing the Bashiqa issue in the joint declaration, "but the political leaders will say the last word," said the official.

Iraq was once one of Turkey's most important trading partners, but there has been a significant decrease in bilateral trade volume due to recent developments. Baghdad wishes to obtain loans from Ankara, while Iraq also says it expects Turkey and Turkish business leaders to invest in the country. However, new investments do not seem realistic in the near term due to Turkish investors' 5.4 billion dollars in receivables from Iraq, as well as security concerns.

The parties will discuss the marketing of Iraqi energy resources through Turkey in talks with Energy Minister Berat Albayrak during the visit. There are nine schools of the Gülen community under the control of the Iraqi central government. Iraq has not yet taken an initiative in these schools, but it is expected that they will deport the teachers in the near future. Some time ago, the Maarif Foundation delegation visited Baghdad and promised support for education, according to the official.

A call by al-Abadi on outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) elements to leave the Sinjar region in northern Iraq was also welcomed in Ankara. Under the security agreement negotiated between Ankara and Baghdad, the Iraqi side has proposed resuming a tripartite mechanism between Turkey, Iraq and the United States for the coordination of the struggle against the PKK.

Iraq wants Turkey to increase humanitarian aid for its 3.4 million citizens who have been displaced due to threat posed by ISIL. In this context, Turkish aid officials will also participate in the visit. Ankara and Baghdad also agreed to share a list of ISIL suspects through security authorities. Iraq has also demanded military and police training and intelligence support from Turkey. Yıldırım will also pay a visit to Arbil and hold discussions with Iraqi Kurdish leaders on the fight against ISIL, the retreat of PKK from Sinjar and economic relations.

Answering questions about the agenda of the scheduled Iraq visit, Yıldırım said they were aiming to convey that the presence of Turkish troops in Bashiqa did not target the territorial sovereignty of Iraq. Noting that mutual relations with Iraq had been tense because of the events in the region over the past 2.5 years, Yıldırım said the Turkish government aimed to develop good relations with Baghdad.

"Within this context, in our Iraq meeting, we will discuss strengthening good neighborly relations between Turkey and Iraq, compensating for economic losses due to previous years, increasing cooperation and improving bilateral trade by mutual investments," he said.

"We will discuss the prevention of PKK attacks to Turkey from Iraqi territory which have been a trouble for Turkey for years, in a framework of respect for the territorial integrity of the two countries," he said, adding that mutual investment and trade would be priority subjects in the meeting.

EU Minister Çelik: Changing Turkey's anti-terror laws would threaten EU security

Hurriyet Daily News, 05.01.2017



Changing Turkey's anti-terrorism laws is out of the question as it would endanger both Turkey and Europe's security, EU Minister Ömer Çelik said.

The EU had preconditioned Turkey to amend its anti-terror laws if it wanted its citizens to access visa-free travel to the bloc. "We have reiterated that we cannot meet EU's demands to amend our anti-terror laws. However, we have no problems in meeting the other criteria," he said with. "To ask a country, which has been hit by many terrorist attacks, to change its anti-terror law, is to put the security of Turkey and Europe in jeopardy," Çelik said, recalling the Jan. 1 attack on Istanbul.

Duncan, for his part, said the U.K. wanted to extend its support to Turkey in its fight against terrorism. "We condemn every kind of attack and threats. There are threats that Turkey tries to overcome. Great Britain is your support in this struggle," Duncan said.

Çelik said Turkey, due to its geopolitical location, is an essential provider of Europe's security. "If the parties desire an agreement, the solution could be found. But if it [solution] is not desired, the process will be blocked," he added.

Earlier, Turkish Prime Minister Binali Yıldırım hosted Duncan in Ankara, where he expressed his desire to enhance cooperation between Turkey and the U.K., according to prime ministry sources. Describing the U.K. as an "ally" and "friend," Yıldırım said Turkey was pleased with the high level of political dialogue and relations. The two countries joint cooperation, fighting against terrorism, Turkey's EU membership process and Cyprus negotiations were also discussed at the meeting.

Turkey, Israel to hold political consultation meeting within month

Hurriyet Daily News, 11.01.2017



Israel and Turkey are drafting a road map for a cooperation agenda following an agreement to normalize relations and appoint respective ambassadors in the wake of the 2010 Mavi Marmara massacre.

The undersecretaries of the two countries' foreign ministries will meet within one month for a political consultation meeting, a Turkish Foreign Ministry official has told. High-level visits will be planned in line with the decisions taken at the meeting, with the economy and tourism to have priority at the mutual visits, the official said.

Turkey will participate in a tourism fair in Israel on Feb. 7 and 8, perhaps at the level of the culture and tourism minister level, the official noted. A visit by Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu to Israel will also be on the agenda when his schedule becomes available.

Officials are aiming to update a free trade agreement between Turkey and Israel by expanding it on issues such as agricultural products. "This is very important for us because the two countries are complementary to each other. In areas such as information, information, innovation; Israel has made significant progress. But they need to find markets for those products. In this respect, Turkey stands out as a very important partner in the region," the official said.

Turkey also expects the mutual lifting of visa procedures with Israel. At the same time, the two countries will step up cooperation on security issues. The official underlined that both countries require consultations on regional security issues such as Syria, and the sharing of security information will be on the agenda during the political consultation meeting, the official added.

Turkish-Israeli relations came to breaking point after Israeli marines stormed the Mavi Marmara flotilla, which was aiming to break a naval blockade on the Hamas-run Gaza Strip in May 2010, killing 10 Turkish activists on board. After six years, Israel apologized for the raid, paying out \$20 million to the bereaved and injured as a part of the rapprochement deal signed between the two countries on June 28. Eitan Na'eh was appointed as Israel's ambassador to Ankara last month, while Kemal Öktem became Turkey's envoy to Tel Aviv.

William Hague backs work visas for EU citizens after Brexit

Financial Times, 13.01.2017



William Hague is worried about Brexit: he fears it could lead to the break-up of the UK, fracture the west, damage business investment and prove a “vast, complex distraction” for Theresa May. His solution: keep it simple.

In his interview, the former foreign secretary urged Mrs May to make the EU a “fair offer on migration” in exchange for a “sensible, fair system of trade”, limiting any damage to British business. Lord Hague’s intervention comes days before Mrs May gives a speech on Brexit strategy; his proposal of a simple work permit scheme for EU nationals is thought to go with the grain of the PM’s own thinking.

Under his plan any EU citizen with a job offer in Britain would qualify for a work permit. There would be little or no welfare support but the freedom to work in Britain would be retained. Such a scheme, he argued, would be simple to operate and would allow Mrs May to say, in his words: “We’re proposing something one step short of free movement so we’re seeking something one step short of the single market.

“We’re not expecting to be in the single market without freedom of movement but we would expect on this basis tariff-free trade across all sectors.” Mrs May is said by ministers to favour the idea of a work visa, an idea also endorsed by pro-Brexit ministers and Amber Rudd, home secretary, although views differ on whether they should be offered to all EU nationals with a job.

“There’s a danger that the negotiation of the exit can become a vast, complex distraction,” Lord Hague said. “There’s a danger that it sucks the energy out of other areas of government and foreign policy, both in the EU and in the UK.”

By keeping Britain close to the single market, he believes Mrs May can minimise tensions with the EU and avoid inflaming public opinion in Scotland, which voted strongly for Remain. Speaking in the library of the Royal United Services Institute, which he chairs, Lord Hague said there would “inevitably be shortages of staff in some areas” if the government tried to judge supply and demand for labour in every sector.

He argues that providing work permits to all EU nationals with jobs — whether they are already in Britain or not — would also “avoid any incentive, any rush, to beat a deadline” before new rules came in. Total migration would fall because of a restriction of access to welfare for EU workers, he said, while the decline in the pound after the Brexit vote would also make it less attractive to work in the UK. Leave campaigners, he said, should welcome his plan because “their spokesmen did not say the objective was to reduce immigration, it was to control it”. Work permits could, in any event, be restricted if there was a sudden surge.



Lord Hague also backed a post-Brexit transitional arrangement to minimise disruption for the City of London, saying it should be a priority for Mrs May. He accepts that Britain will leave the single market but is unsure whether the country should quit the customs union.

At the relatively, politically, tender age of 55, Lord Hague has become one of his party's elder statesmen. He does not want to rock the boat for Mrs May — "I'm an unashamed fan" — but his intervention will strengthen the hand of those in the cabinet who want a liberal EU migration regime.

He did not support Mrs May's decision to criticise John Kerry, US secretary of state, after he attacked Israeli settlement building in occupied Palestinian territories — a move seen as an attempt by the prime minister to curry favour with US president-elect Donald Trump.

"Personally I agree with John Kerry's speech," he said. "There is a really serious danger now the prospect of a two-state solution is finally slipping away and is dying altogether." As for Mr Trump? "If instability in the western alliance was produced by the United States itself, the indispensable anchor of the whole alliance, that would of course be very concerning," Lord Hague said. "But let's see what they actually do."

Lord Hague endorses Boris Johnson, his successor at the Foreign Office, as "a brilliant guy", saying he is a "big enough figure to take a bit of flak" — including jokes at his expense by Mrs May. Lord Hague's new life ranges from working with Angelina Jolie in a campaign against sexual violence, to corporate roles, newspaper columns, plans to write another history book about the 18th century and public speaking. But his big passion is "doing a lot of work on garden design" at his new home in mid-Wales.

Is he doing the work himself? "No, no," he says, surprised at the suggestion. "But I feel this is a very fulfilling part of my life. And I have no regrets about leaving government, particularly in the light of events since I left."

UK labour lawmaker quits, testing Corbyn in Brexit heartlands

Bloomberg, 13.01.2017



U.K. opposition lawmaker Tristram Hunt said he will step down from Parliament, triggering a special election that will test the popularity of his Labour Party and the Independence Party in one of the most pro-Brexit areas of the country.

Hunt, who is leaving politics to run London's Victoria and Albert Museum, has represented Stoke-on-Trent Central since 2010 and won with 39 percent of the vote in 2015, compared with about 23 percent for UKIP and the ruling Conservative Party. The departure of Hunt poses another challenge to Labour Leader Jeremy Corbyn, who lags Prime Minister Theresa May in most opinion polls

And Corbyn has been repeatedly criticized by fellow members of Parliament even after the party's rank and file backed his leadership last year. Lawmaker Jamie Reed said last month he is also quitting Parliament, forcing another tricky by-election upon Labour.

About 65 percent of voters in the constituency, located in the English midlands, backed Brexit, according to estimates by Chris Hanretty of the University of East Anglia. Having achieved its primary goal of winning the vote to quit the European Union, UKIP plans to challenge Labour in its traditional heartlands under new leader Paul Nuttall.

"UKIP will be fighting hard to offer local people the committed representation they both need and deserve," party Chairman Paul Oakden said in an e-mail. "We have no doubt that the example set by Mr. Hunt will be one that many voters in Stoke-on-Trent will consider following in the upcoming by-election."

Corbyn has struggled to articulate a Labour response to Brexit and UKIP has accused him of being out of touch with the party's working-class voters. Hunt, 42, campaigned against Brexit and has publicly criticized Corbyn's leadership.

"I congratulate Tristram Hunt on being named Director of the V and A," Culture Secretary Karen Bradley said in an e-mailed statement. "He has a wealth of experience as a historian and a great passion for arts and culture that will serve him very well in this role."

Trump's remarks on trade deficit rattle Japan

WSJ, 13.01.2017



Top Japanese officials pushed back against President-elect Donald Trump's suggestions that Japan is a drag on the U.S. economy, highlighting nervousness in one of America's closest allies about friction with the incoming U.S. administration.

Mr. Trump on Wednesday named Japan as one of the countries contributing to the U.S. trade deficit, reiterating claims during the election campaign of unfair economic ties with Tokyo. Japanese Finance Minister Taro Aso said Friday it was inappropriate to include Japan with countries that have larger trade surpluses with the U.S.

"In terms of trade imbalances, China is No. 1," Mr. Aso said at a news conference, also noting that Mr. Trump didn't mention Germany's larger trade surplus with the U.S. in his latest remarks. Japan had a \$42 billion surplus with the U.S. in trade in goods and services between January and September, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. China had \$232 billion in surplus over that period, followed by Germany's \$52 billion and Mexico's \$46 billion. More attention should be given to Japanese companies' creation of around 800,000 jobs in the U.S., Mr. Aso said.

"We need the numbers to reach his [Mr. Trump's] ears," Mr. Aso said. Tokyo is nervous about Mr. Trump's criticism both because Japan considers itself the U.S.'s closest ally in Asia and because the U.S. is Japan's single biggest export market. The U.S. accounted for a fifth of Japanese exports, totaling 63.360 trillion yen (\$55.24 billion), between January and November, according to Japan's government.

Memories of harsh criticism from some in the U.S. of Japan's rapid economic ascent in the 1980s also remain fresh in the minds of many Japanese. In preparation for the new U.S. administration, Tokyo has been putting together files on Japan's economic contributions to the U.S. to share with Mr. Trump and his staff, such as investment and job creation figures, according to government officials.

At least two of Japan's corporate chiefs have directly approached Mr. Trump and his staff to smooth relations, including Toyota Motor Corp. Chief Executive Akio Toyoda, who met with Vice President-elect Mike Pence in Washington on Tuesday. Mr. Trump targeted Toyota last week by saying in a tweet "no way" to its plans to build Corolla sedans in Mexico.

Mr. Trump has also taken aim at the cost to the U.S. of stationing troops in Japan as part of a bilateral defense treaty. In a Senate confirmation hearing Thursday, Mr. Trump's nominee for defense secretary, retired Marine Corps Gen. James Mattis, echoed those concerns. "The American taxpayer should not carry a disproportionate part of our shared defense," Mr. Mattis said.

Japan's top government spokesman, Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga, said at a press conference Friday that costs to the U.S. and Japan to maintain security in and around Japan are appropriately divided between Japan and the U.S.

Mr. Suga added that Japan wants to strengthen security ties with the U.S. further and is prepared to carry its share of the burden. "Japan wants to play a more active role to deal with a more challenging security environment," he said. The U.S. spends about \$5.5 billion a year on its bases and personnel in Japan, while Tokyo says it spends a roughly similar amount annually to support U.S. bases in Japan and the region. Prime Minister Shinzo Abe was the first global leader to meet Mr. Trump after his November election victory, underscoring the importance to Japan of the U.S. alliance.

Donald Trump is making the great man theory of history great again

Foreign Policy, 12.01.2017



The imminent ascension to the U.S. presidency of Donald Trump, a man whose supporters and detractors both agree is exceptional in the context of American history, raises a question which historians and social scientists generally prefer to shy away from:

To what extent does historical change depend on the actions of a handful of unusual individuals — history's archetypal Great Men and Women — as opposed to large-scale, long-term, impersonal forces? Professional academics who have tried to offer perspective on Trump's victory and upcoming presidency have generally emphasized the latter.

They tend to identify the key phenomenon of the 2016 election as "populism" — an upsurge of hostility to elites, which they explain by reference to the changing social and cultural conditions that left a large group of white Americans economically vulnerable, fearful of outsiders, and bitterly resentful. They credit Trump with successfully mobilizing this group but devote more analysis to the social phenomenon than to Trump himself.

But the explanatory power of populism may be far stronger for explaining the election than in forecasting what is about to happen next. Though impersonal forces may have given rise to Trump, the president-elect himself resists analysis as a predictable, impersonal force. And so, even as Trump claims a mandate to remake the United States, he may force social scientists and historians to look beyond their usual analytical tools in order to explain his presidency. academic penchant for structural explanations is hardly surprising — and not just because most academics find it difficult to take Donald Trump seriously (unfortunately, history has suggested, time and again, that we have to distinguish between respecting people and taking them seriously).



The modern social sciences have always found it difficult to deal with the sort of unpredictable, willful phenomenon that Trump represents. From the 18th century onward, these disciplines, including history, have taken seriously their status as sciences.

That is, they have taken seriously the idea that scholars can discover regular, predictable patterns of change at work beneath the apparent flux and confusion of history. These regular, predictable patterns might not have the absolute, scientifically verifiable quality of natural laws, but they are nonetheless held to matter more than the character and actions of particular individuals, no matter how prominent.

Marxist historians and social scientists have put these claims forward most famously, but a belief in the power of large-scale impersonal forces has hardly been limited to the left. The great 19th-century French social thinker Alexis de Tocqueville wrote magnificent studies of American democracy and the origins of the French Revolution in which even the most prominent historical actors made virtually no appearance.

The true protagonist of both books was equality itself, which Tocqueville saw as the defining feature of modern times: a great force that swept over kings and presidents as surely as it did other members of society. There have always been apparent dissenters from this tradition.

Hegel, in his philosophy of history, emphasized the role of what he called “world-historical individuals” — the great examples were Julius Caesar and Napoleon Bonaparte. The 19th-century British writer Thomas Carlyle delivered a series of lectures in the 1830s in which he argued that “Universal History, the history of what man has accomplished in this world, is at bottom the History of the Great Men who have worked here.”

Yet both Hegel and Carlyle ultimately saw the individuals they singled out as in some sense channeling or crystallizing — or at least acknowledging and reckoning with — larger, impersonal forces. Carlyle, for instance, argued that Napoleon only succeeded because of his faith “that this new enormous Democracy... is an unsuppressible Fact, which the whole world, with its old forces and institutions, cannot put down.”

Yet despite its intellectual power, the “scientific” models have never entirely overcome an older mode of explanation that might be termed “heroic” and that attributes far greater importance to questions of individual character. Yet despite its intellectual power, the “scientific” models have never entirely overcome an older mode of explanation that might be termed “heroic” and that attributes far greater importance to questions of individual character.

Americans have a particular weakness for this way of understanding historical change. They have a boundless appetite for books that celebrate the Founding Fathers. They like to see George Washington’s steadfastness as the reason for the success of the American Revolution and Abraham Lincoln’s courage and vision as the key factor ensuring the North’s victory in the Civil War. Tomes like David McCullough’s best-selling biographies of Theodore Roosevelt, Harry Truman, and John Adams play brilliantly to the public taste for such explanations. It is no accident that McCullough ended his Truman biography with a quote from the journalist Eric Sevareid: “Remembering him reminds people what a man in that office ought to be like. It’s character, just character. He stands like a rock in memory now.”



Such judgments, backed by McCullough's colorful, entertaining descriptions of a flinty, no-nonsense, fundamentally decent Truman, tended to reduce the complex historical forces that shaped the first Cold War presidency to wan background context, quickly skimmed through in order to reach the next juicy anecdote about "Give 'em hell" Harry in action.

As a professional historian, this sort of analysis is entirely contrary to the way I was trained, which was to see social change developing across broad swaths of society, not emanating from particular individuals.

Moreover, I was partly trained in France, under the aegis of the so-called Annales school, whose vision of history could not be more different from the heroic one. Fernand Braudel, one of the leaders of the school, taught his followers to pay attention to the deep, slow, geological, and climactic forces that, in determining the shape of the continents and patterns of global warming and cooling, ultimately shape human societies as well. After that, Braudel directed us to study centuries-long patterns of economic and social change. He compared all these subjects to the deep currents moving through oceans. Mere "event history," by contrast, including decisions taken by powerful individuals, he likened to the insignificant foam tossed up on the ocean's surface.

Much of the history influenced by Braudel barely even mentioned particular individuals, let alone attributed a decisive influence to them. In short, my instinct was long to treat the "heroic mode" as simplistic and misleading.

But a long career of teaching modern European history to undergraduates has slowly undermined these certainties. It has been particularly hard to teach the history of 20th-century Europe without often lapsing into the heroic mode — or rather into the mode of "heroes and villains." It has been hard to avoid the conclusion that as the destructive power of states increased — exponentially — in the 20th century, and as the scope of their activities broadened, the character of the people who controlled them rose hugely in significance, especially in dictatorial states.

Adolf Hitler and Joseph Stalin are the most obvious examples. It can be argued that large-scale historical forces would have brought figures like them to power in both Germany and the Soviet Union and that those same forces dictated many of the policies that they in fact pursued.

But these larger forces in no way dictated everything these monstrously willful tyrants did. Their characters, and the choices they made, mattered. The decision to pursue rapid, hugely disruptive industrialization in the Soviet Union, coupled with the violent collectivization of agriculture, depended on Stalin's character and his particular strategies for seizing and maintaining power for himself. It is doubtful that any of his political rivals would have pursued the same policies — or, for that matter, have implemented the horrific deliberate starvation of Ukraine or the Great Terror of 1937-38.

As for Hitler, although it can be argued that large-scale historical forces pushed Germany toward totalitarian dictatorship and aggressive militarism, it is much harder to see why another German dictator would necessarily have embraced his insane racial theories. These theories led both to the Holocaust and to the attempt to conquer the Soviet Union. And it was the latter foolhardy adventure that brought about Hitler's rapid downfall. In my undergraduate lectures, I also highlight the significance of another character: Winston Churchill.



Pig-headed, romantic, and a die-hard imperialist, Churchill was probably the British politician least traumatized by the horrific slaughter of World War I. That slaughter left many of his fellow leaders ready to pay almost any price for peace.

Churchill, by contrast, was not only ready to fight Nazi Germany well before 1939 but could rally the British people with a rhetoric of glory and honor that much of his generation thought had been discredited forever by the horrors of trench warfare. During the decisive hours of the Battle of Britain, Churchill's personality mattered, enormously.

These examples also suggest that individual character matters far more at some moments than at others. After 1942, for instance, the characters of Hitler, Stalin, and Churchill all started to matter less than before. The most important "character-dependent" decisions had been made, regarding Soviet industrialization and terror, the drive to war and then the Battle of Britain, and Hitler's invasion of the USSR. After 1942, it was the industrial might of the allied powers and their access to natural resources — i.e., impersonal social and economic forces — which became ever more important factors pushing the war to its conclusion. A similar story could be told about the American Civil War.

As that conflict's most eminent historian, James McPherson, has argued, war leadership, including especially Abraham Lincoln's, mattered most through the summer of 1862 and the Battle of Antietam. After that battle, which checked an ambitious offensive by the Confederacy and ended its hopes of receiving European recognition and support, the North's advantages in population, industry, and resources made themselves felt more and more, overcoming often superior Southern generalship. But up to Antietam, the individual decisions made by Lincoln, Jefferson Davis, and the most important generals — all themselves dependent on issues of character and personality — mattered a great deal.

So how can this history help us understand our current political moment? On the one hand, quite obviously, personality mattered in the 2016 election. In Hillary Clinton, the Democratic Party managed to nominate one of the least personable politicians in recent memory. She lacked both her husband's uncanny ability to bond with strangers and Barack Obama's ability to inspire with soaring rhetoric. As her opponent cruelly but quite accurately observed, until the very end she needed celebrities at her side to draw a crowd.

Trump, by contrast, whatever you may think of him, forged a powerful, personal connection with millions of voters. Not only did he understand and channel their anger at the elites they believed had abandoned them; he delighted them with his utter disdain for the rules those elites allegedly enforced and that he mocked as "political correctness." In a close election, it's true by definition that any number of factors decided the outcome — including Russian hacking, and the extraordinary behavior of the FBI — but personality was certainly an important one.

Even so, the fact that Trump won in the year of Brexit, and a year in which populist forces have gained ground across Europe, clearly points to the limits of any interpretation centered on personality alone. More than a quarter century after the triumphant conclusion of the Cold War, free-market liberal democracy is looking decidedly ragged and threadbare.



In the Western world, the divide looms ever greater between highly educated, wealthy, and largely secular elites and much of the rest of the population. The free movement across borders of ideas, goods, and people is seen largely as a boon by the former and largely as a threat by the latter.

Had Donald Trump not emerged to tap into the frustrations of the people who propelled him to the presidency, it is hard to imagine that another candidate would not have managed to do so, if not in this election, then soon. Trump's personality — the crudeness, the bullying, the disdain for others' opinions, the self-aggrandizement — all proved a good match for the electoral moment.

However much these traits led liberals to despise and fear him — indeed, precisely because they led liberals to despise and fear him — they resonated with millions of other voters who saw in Hillary Clinton everything they hated about a political system they thought of as fundamentally corrupt.

But, of course, Trump's personality traits drove many others away. In short, it is hard not to agree with my academic colleagues who have put populism, more than personality, at the center of their analyses of the election. But if personality and character were not the major factor deciding the 2016 election, the Trump presidency will likely be a very different story.

Not only is Trump becoming the leader of the most powerful state the world has ever seen, but thanks to Republican control of Congress — and soon, quite possibly, the Supreme Court — Trump has the potential to become the most powerful president in American history.

And he is one of the most radically unpredictable men ever elected to that office. He is not guided by a distinct, systematic ideology, and he is not, to say the least, constrained by humility or self-doubt. In foreign policy, he has surrounded himself with advisors like Michael Flynn and Frank Gaffney who give credence to conspiracy theories and see Islam — not just radical jihadism, but Islam itself — as an existential threat to the United States. In domestic policy, he has assembled a team whose ties to international business and the "swamp" of Washingtonian corruption contradict much of his own populist rhetoric.

Despite the vast power at the disposal of the American president, most occupants of that office, even when commanding congressional majorities, have felt constrained by a host of structural conditions of one sort or another.

They want to avoid spooking the stock market, damaging their party's chances in future elections, upsetting carefully negotiated diplomatic agreements, and so on and so forth. They almost certainly have a lower estimate of their own power than almost anyone else. But these constraints, which change far more slowly than a president's moods, make the actions they take more predictable and therefore more easily subject to social scientific analysis.

Donald Trump, however, is so willful and thin-skinned, so convinced of his own abilities, so enamored of his own unpredictability, and at the same time so unable to concentrate on any particular issue, that he is far less likely to appreciate the constraints that have weighed so heavily on his predecessors or even to understand them. He is also far less likely to listen to his advisors, and these advisers themselves are, overall, far more ignorant of their supposed areas of expertise than any other group of high-level administration officials in American history.



Even in crisis situations, U.S. presidents have generally done their best to follow predictable, well-established decision-making protocols. The television shows that present a president making hugely consequential decisions under pressure, from the gut, with only a handful of close aides in the room, eliminate from the picture the vast bureaucratic operations that exist to provide information, to evaluate the reliability of that information, to analyze it, and to game out the possible consequences of different courses of action.

Up to now, presidents have generally respected these bureaucracies in most cases. They know how important it is, in a world of nuclear weapons, for there to be steady, predictable protocols for resolving crises.

They remember all too well that during the Cuban missile crisis of 1962, only the steadfastness of a single Soviet military officer kept a submarine commander from launching a tactical nuclear weapon against an American destroyer, possibly provoking nuclear war (if you don't know the story, read this). Donald Trump, alas, is almost certainly less likely to follow established protocols than any of his predecessors. In a crisis situation, how is he likely to react? Can anyone know? As 2016 draws to a close, the world still seems, thankfully, to be far removed from the sort of crisis situations in which the characters of Stalin, Hitler, and Churchill mattered so deeply.

The civil war in Syria, dreadful as it is, remains a regional conflict with little potential, at least at present, to spark any sort of wider confrontation. There is no shortage of scenarios — a major terrorist attack in the West, a collapse of the nuclear agreement with Iran, renewed Russian aggression in its “near abroad” — that could present an American president with deeply consequential decisions to make.

In these decisions, Donald Trump's personality could assume, difficult as it is to apply these words to him, world-historical importance. As a consequence, the personalities of other leaders, especially Vladimir Putin, could also come to matter in critical ways, as they come into conflict with Trump. If impersonal forces lead to Trump's personal rise, it's now all too easy to imagine his troubled personality leading to his country's collective fall.



Announcements & Reports

Analysis of developments in EU capital flows in the global context

Source : Bruegel

Weblink : <http://bruegel.org/2017/01/analysis-of-developments-in-eu-capital-flows-in-the-global-context-3rd-annual-report/>

U.S.-China challenges: Time for China to step up

Source : Brookings

Weblink : <https://www.brookings.edu/research/u-s-china-challenges-time-for-china-to-step-up/>

Energy Relations in the Euro-Mediterranean: A Political Economy Perspective

Source : Bruegel

Weblink : <http://bruegel.org/2016/12/energy-relations-in-the-euro-mediterranean-a-political-economy-perspective/>

Upcoming Events

Emerging Markets and Europe: Time for Different Relationships?

Date : 17 January 2016

Place : Brussels - Belgium

Website : <http://www.bruegel.org/nc/events/event-detail/event/524-emerging-markets-and-europe-time-for-different-relationships/>

What future for Europe's Social Models?

Date : 18 January 2016

Place : Brussels - Belgium

Website : <http://www.bruegel.org/nc/events/event-detail/event/526-what-future-for-europes-social-models/>

Challenges for Growth in Europe

Date : 19 January 2016

Place : Brussels - Belgium

Website : <http://www.bruegel.org/nc/events/event-detail/event/521-challenges-for-growth-in-europe/>

Global Governance of Public Goods: Asian and European Perspectives

Date : 23 January 2016

Place : Paris - France

Website : <http://www.bruegel.org/nc/events/event-detail/event/529-global-governance-of-public-goods-asian-and-european-perspectives/>



The Future of the Welfare State

Date : 24 January 2016
Place : Berlin - Germany
Website : <http://www.bruegel.org/nc/events/event-detail/event/541-the-future-of-the-welfare-state/>

Vision Europe Summit 2016

Date : 25 January 2016
Place : Lisbon - Portugal
Website : <http://bruegel.org/events/vision-europe-summit-2016/>