

Turkish envoy to Israel vows to improve ties

Hurriyet Daily News, 25.01.2017



The Turkish ambassador to Israel Kemal Ökem has vowed to improve ties with his host country in his first interview with local media. Speaking hours after Israeli Defense Minister Avigdor Lieberman announced the approval of 2,500 new housing units in the West Bank, Ökem told i24NEWS in an interview, that Turkey supports “both sides in the efforts toward peace” but acts according to international law regarding the settlements.

“We have a strong will to enhance dialogue,” Ökem said, saying that there will be visits on both sides and that Turkey’s tourism minister plans to visit Israel next month.

Ökem said the director-general of Israeli Foreign Ministry would travel to Ankara by the end of the month to meet his counterpart in an effort to boost relations. “In every field we can think of, we will progress,” Ökem said.

Ökem also said that his country’s position on Israeli settlements was clear; that they are illegal and endanger the prospects for peace, according to the report. “We will do anything possible to bring peace, but that depends on the will of both sides,” he asserted. Ökem emphasized that “we must keep [prospects for peace] alive.”

Israel announced plans on Tuesday for 2,500 more settlement homes in the occupied West Bank, the second such declaration since U.S. President Donald Trump took office signalling he could be more accommodating toward such projects than his predecessor.

A statement from the Israeli Defense Ministry, which administers lands Israel captured in a 1967 war, announced plans for 2,500 more settlement homes in the occupied West Bank, the second such declaration since U.S. President Donald Trump took office signaling he could be more accommodating toward such projects than his predecessor.

It said the decision was meant to fulfil demand for new housing “to maintain regular daily life.” Most of the construction, it said, would be in existing settlement blocs that Israel intends to keep under any future peace agreement with the Palestinians. However, a breakdown provided by the prime minister’s office showed large portions of the planned homes would be outside existing blocs.

Turkey condemned the Israeli government’s approval of the construction of 2,500 additional units in “illegal settlements on the Palestinian territories it keeps under occupation,” a written statement by the Foreign Ministry said. “We call on Israel to quit insisting on pursuing this problematic approach that destroys the vision for the two state solution by disregarding international law and human rights,” read the statement.

Erdoğan: Turkish-US ties need urgent action

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Turkey and the United States should take immediate steps to re-evaluate the strategic framework of bilateral ties after Donald Trump took the helm as the new U.S. president, President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has said.

“My wish is to meet Mr. Trump without much delay. On the top issues we’ll raise when we’ll meet will be making a fresh assessment of the Turkey-U.S. relationship within a strategic concept. Are our strategic ties running healthily now? No. We should make them healthy,” Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan said while returning from Africa.

One of the most important issues will be the Middle East as the Turkish-U.S. partnership in the region needs to be healthy, Erdoğan said. “We are two NATO countries but it can’t be said that our current level of solidarity befits NATO countries. Of course, in that regard, we will also have the chance to learn better what Mr. Trumps meant with his recent statements on NATO.”

Trump recently described NATO as obsolete and an old-fashioned institution. On the fight against the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), the U.S.-led international coalition is yet to deliver the required support to Turkey, Erdoğan said, recalling that a fresh and positive process had begun in Astana to find a solution to the Syrian problem.

“I plan to hold a meeting with [Russian President Vladimir] Putin. There could also be an opportunity to hold a phone conversation with Mr. Trump before a face-to-face meeting,” he said. Another important issue between Turkey and the U.S. is the need to further improve the economic relationship, particularly in the field of the defense industry, Erdoğan said.

“There were so many joint steps we have taken in the field of the defense industry until today. Will we continue through joint investments or through the logic of ‘You are the market, I am the trader?’ We prefer to continue with joint ventures,” the president said.

Erdoğan said Turkish troops and Free Syrian Army (FSA) forces had besieged al-Bab in a bid to defeat ISIL elements in the strategically important city, recalling how sensitive the Turkish Armed Forces (TSK) were in not hurting civilians there.

“DEASH is seriously losing blood there. We are conducting our works with coalition forces. Russia is lending support from time to time. We are losing time because of our care for civilians,” the president said, using the Arabic acronym for ISIL. “We will evaluate all these with the prime minister and the TSK. If we have a chance to talk to Trump, as I have said, the Middle East will be among issues we’ll raise. We can’t lose time on it,” he added.

Asked how the Turkish government would press on Washington for the extradition of Fethullah Gülen, a self-exiled cleric accused of being the mastermind of the July 2016 coup attempt, Erdoğan said the issue would be part of his face-to-face meeting with Trump. “Our wish is an immediate accomplishment of this thing. We will ask about the fate of the 85 dossiers we provided them. And we will continue to send more dossiers under the investigation,” he said.

Asked why a joint communiqué released in Astana did not list the Syrian Democratic Union Party (PYD) and its armed wing, the People’s Protection Units (YPG), among groups that need to be defeated in Syria, Erdoğan deferred to Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu, who has been accompanying him during the African tour.

“As you know, there was talk about the inclusion of the YPG at the Astana talks, but we did not allow this. That’s why it’s normal that the YPG made such a statement [that the Astana talks do not bind them]. There are different views on the YPG and the Hezbollah. Iran supports Hezbollah and other Shiite militias,” Çavuşoğlu said.

These groups are also supported by the Syrian government while Russia is not fully against them, Çavuşoğlu said. “Therefore providing a consensus on a joint fight against them is not possible. On the fight against the YPG, we know Iran and Russia are not as cool as the United States. We also know how Russia and particularly Iran are against the YPG.”

Turkey awaits results of US study on safe zones in Syria

Anadolu Agency, 17.01.2017



Turkey has always supported the idea of safe zones in Syria but would need to review any U.S. plans before commenting on a draft executive order that is expected to be signed by President Trump regarding safe zones in Syria, Ankara has said.

“We have seen the U.S. president’s request to conduct a study. What’s important is the results of this study and what kind of recommendation will come out,” Müftüoğlu told. His comments came after Trump pledged to order safe zones in Syria. “I will absolutely do safe zones in Syria for the people,” Trump said.

The U.S. president was set to order the Pentagon and State Department to act in accordance to the implementation of safe zones in Syria, Reuters reported. “The Secretary of State, in conjunction with the Secretary of Defense, is directed within 90 days of the date of this order to produce a plan to provide safe areas in Syria and in the surrounding region in which Syrian nationals displaced from their homeland can await firm settlement, such as repatriation or potential third-country resettlement,” the draft order said seen by Reuters.



The Kremlin said on Jan. 26 that Trump's administration should consider the implications of establishing a safe zone in Syria, adding that the U.S. had not consulted Russia before the declaration.

"No, our American partners did not consult with us. It's a sovereign decision," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said in a conference call with reporters. "It is important that this [the plan] does not exacerbate the situation with refugees, but probably all the consequences ought to be weighed up."

"Setting up of safe zones is something Turkey has advocated from the very beginning. The best example is in Jarablus," Müftüo lu said, citing the northern Syrian region where thousands of Syrians have returned after Turkish-backed opposition forces drove out the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL).

After supporting the Free Syrian Army (FSA) fighting against Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, Turkey has trained and equipped a new Syrian police force that has started to work in Jarablus, a border town freed from ISIL by FSA.

Turkey's Operation Euphrates Shield, which was launched in August 2016 against ISIL, has gained control over 100 kilometers territory from the border, producing what Turkish officials have been referring to as a "de facto safe zone."

Asked about attacks by the Jabhat Fateh al-Sham group, formerly known as the al-Nusra front, on the FSA, Müftüo lu said some elements in Syria may be frustrated by progress made at peace talks backed by Turkey, Russia and Iran in Astana.

Meanwhile, Syrian Islamist rebel group Ahrar al-Sham said on Jan. 26 that six other rebel factions, al-Wiyat Suqour al-Sham; Fastaqim; Jaish al-Islam's Idlib branch, Jaish al-Mujahideen; al-Jabha al-Shamiya's west Aleppo branch, as well as the Sham Revolutionary Brigades had joined its ranks in northwestern Syria in order to fend off a major assault by the Jabhat Fateh al-Sham, according to Reuters.

A three-way mechanism between Turkey, Russia and Iran to enforce a cease-fire in Syria is still being worked on after talks between the warring parties, and Turkey will not permit "spoilers" to overshadow the efforts that are being undertaken, he noted.

"It is incumbent on guarantor countries to prevent that from happening," Muftüo lu said. He also answered questions as to whether Turkey had changed its opposition to al-Assad, saying, "The Syrian leader has no place in the country's future."

British PM May to visit Turkey on Jan 28

Hurriyet Daily News, 24.01.2017



British Prime Minister Theresa May will visit Turkey on Jan. 28 and meet Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, a spokesman said, as the British leader seeks to prepare for post-Brexit trade deals.

The visit will be May's first to Turkey as prime minister and she is expected to fly directly to Ankara from the United States, the Downing Street spokesman said. The visit would "reflect the fact that Turkey is an indispensable partner and a close ally for the UK on many issues of global importance including trade, security and defense," the spokesman added.

Asked if May would raise human rights with the Turkish leaders, the spokesman told reporters: "We have been clear in our support for Turkey's democracy and institutions." Since last July's failed coup attempt, Turkey has jailed about 40,000 people pending trial and has suspended or dismissed more than 100,000 from the military, judiciary and public services, on grounds of being a member of an organization led by U.S.-based Islamic preacher Fethullah Gülen, which the Turkish government accuses of orchestrating the failed coup attempt.

"The prime minister will take this opportunity to reiterate our support for that but we will also be clear that Turkey's response to that must be proportionate and of course we will continue to raise those issues," he added.

May is planning talks with senior Republicans in Philadelphia on Jan. 26 and then U.S. President Donald Trump in Washington on Jan. 27 in what will be his first meeting as president with a foreign leader. May is making preparations for Britain to leave the European Union but has said she wants her country to be "truly global" and has started talks on possible trade deals with several countries including Turkey.

Turkey and the U.K. are two of the three guarantor powers in Cyprus island, along with Greece, and efforts to find a solution to the more than 40-year-old conflict has reached a five-party level with the inclusion of the guarantor powers apart from Turkish and Greek Cypriot administrations.

Britain and Turkey are also both part of the U.S.-led coalition that has carried out air strikes against the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and other jihadists in Syria since 2014, as well as being involved in peace negotiations between the Syrian regime and the armed opposition.

Turkish official: Still early for constitutional draft in Syria

Hurriyet Daily News, 25.01.2017



Turkey is not aware of a constitutional draft handed over to Syrian officials from a Russian delegation in Astana, a Foreign Ministry official has said, noting that the stages of the political transitional process have been outlined by U.N. Security Council.

“No draft constitution was presented to us. I don’t know if any was submitted to the opposition,” a senior foreign ministry official familiar with the Astana talks told. Guarantor countries decided to restrict the framework of Astana talks merely to just the cease-fire, the official said, noting that they would be able to pave the way for a political process later.

The U.N. resolution suggests first establishing a transitional body and then drafting a constitution. Russia presented a proposal on a new constitution for conflict-torn Syria during a meeting with the chief representative of the rebel factions, Mohammed Alloush, in the Kazakh capital Astana. Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said on Jan. 25 that the blueprint written by Russian experts was based on opinions from the Syrian government, opposition and regional powers.

Alexander Lavrentiev, who led his country’s delegation at the talks, on Jan. 24 said that Russia had presented the rebels with the draft text of the constitution “to help speed up this process and give it some more impetus.”

“In no way do we want to interfere in the drafting and adopting of the basic law of the constitution of the country. We believe that the Syrian people must lead this process,” Lavrentiev said. Syria’s opposition reportedly rejected the proposal warning Kremlin against repeating the mistake made by the George W. Bush administration when U.S. overthrew Iraq’s dictator Saddam Hussein.

Turkish, Russian and Iranian delegations will come together in the coming days to discuss a cease-fire monitoring system and will also discuss enforcement measures for the truce. Turkey considers the inclusion of Iran in the cease-fire as “success” because the violations in a truce deal brokered by Turkey and Russia were made by the Syrian regime and Hezbollah militias over the justification that some Syrian opposition groups in Barada Valley and East Ghouta were affiliated to al-Nusra, which is excluded from the deal.

The official said the Astana meeting aimed to bring the armed groups and the regime together, although views of the parties on the cease-fire, such as complaints made by the opposition regarding cease-fire violations in Barada Valley and East Ghouta, were discussed indirectly. Turkey has made special efforts for the participation of U.N. Special Envoy for Syria Staffan de Mistura at the talks, the official said, adding that the contribution of the U.S. is also crucial to achieve success to resolve the Syrian crisis.

Ankara attributes value to participation of armed groups at the upcoming talks in Geneva, so that the cease-fire could be reinforced and outcomes of the peace talks could be implemented on the ground. But the earlier structure of the Syrian rebel delegation should also be preserved in Geneva, the official stressed.

Deputy PM: Turkey will not hand over al-Bab to Syrian regime

Hurriyet Daily News, 19.01.2017



Turkey will not hand over control of Al-Bab to the Bashar al-Assad regime after it clears the town of ISIL jihadists, Deputy Prime Minister Kurtulmu has stated.

“Al-Bab belongs to the people of Al -Bab,” Kurtulmu told, stressing that local people must be in charge of running the town, as in Jarablus. He denied claims that Turkey will conduct its military offensive on Al-Bab and then leave it in the hands of regime forces. “The Euphrates Shield Operation to Al-Bab is not an operation that aims to clear the area and then hand it over to the regime,” Kurtulmu said.

“It is an operation to protect the borders of Turkey and to immediately eliminate the threats to Turkey south of the border,” he said. The deputy prime minister recalled mortar shells fired by ISIL into the southern Turkish province of Kilis and noted that YPG elements, which Turkey sees as an offshoot of the outlawed Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK), were leaking into Turkey through the border.

“The main purpose of this operation is to clear the cities there and to hand over those cities to the local people. Jarablus is a successful example of that,” he noted, also reiterating that the anti-ISIL coalition forces have failed to support Turkey’s Euphrates Shield Operation.

“The problem is not only about Al-Bab. From the very beginning the Obama administration has not had a plan for resolving the Syrian crisis,” Kurtulmu said, while expressing hope that the new Trump administration in Washington will make efforts in favor of the people of the region.

It has been speculated that the Russia and Turkey have been discussing the possibility of a Syrian regime offensive into Al-Bab, which Turkish army-backed forces have been besieging for weeks against stubborn ISIL resistance.

More than 40 Turkish soldiers have been killed in the offensive on Al-Bab, where Free Syrian Army (FSA) fighters backed by the Turkish army have reached the town’s western and northern outskirts.

Brexit bill: Theresa May publishes Article 50 legislation in preparation for MPs' vote

Independent, 27.01.2017



The Bill to start Brexit by allowing Theresa May to trigger the Article 50 exit clause is just eight lines long. Ministers have stuck to their vow to make the legislation as short as possible – to try to head off Parliamentary attempts to amend it and shape the Brexit process.

The strikingly brief Bill – and the decision to allocate MPs just five days to debate it – immediately sparked an angry protest from Labour MPs. One called on Jeremy Corbyn to order Labour to vote against the timetable, to allow more debate, something the Labour leader will be desperate not to do – having vowed not to “obstruct” Brexit.

Liberal Democrat leader Tim Farron also condemned the length of the Bill: “This Bill is short and not sweet. Given how long he’s been campaigning to leave the EU, it’s amazing this 133 word bill took David Davis such a long time – that’s only five words a day since Brexit.

“Take back control was a mantra of the leave campaign, but this government’s extreme reluctance to involve parliament in this process has instead been an affront to parliamentary sovereignty and democracy.

“With Labour totally confused over Brexit and the Conservatives determined to take us out of Europe and the Single Market at any cost, only the Liberal Democrats are fighting for full membership of the Single Market and a public vote on the final deal.”

The Government’s plans to publish the Bill this week was revealed by the Independent on Monday. The wording of the Bill also raised eyebrows, because it does not state Theresa May’s deadline – 31 March – for triggering Article 50.

The Department for Exiting the European Union said it was “not normal procedure for Bills to have deadlines within them”. A spokeswoman pointed out that the Commons had already, on a non-binding motion before Christmas, backed that timetable.

And David Davis, the Brexit Secretary, said: “Today, we have introduced a Bill in Parliament which will allow us to formally trigger Article 50 by the end of March. “I trust that Parliament, which backed the referendum by six to one, will respect the decision taken by the British people and pass the legislation quickly.”The Bill was published after the Supreme Court ruled against the Prime Minister’s attempts to trigger Article 50 ruling that MPs and peers must give their consent to invoking Article 50. MPs will sit late into the night next week, as the Government aims for the Bill to also clear the House of Lords by early March.

Is Trump even ready to host America's most important ally?

Foreign Policy, 25.01.2017



Its off to the British embassy for beating out the foreign competition and landing the first post-inaugural meeting between the president of the United States and a foreign leader — British Prime Minister Theresa May. Unfortunately, sometimes you get what you ask for: Both leaders will meet under immense pressure to bring home the goods and show the critics their foreign policy chops.

All eyes will search the faces of the two leaders for signs of success or failure as they emerge from their meeting to face the press. So what does May want in the bag from her meeting with Trump?

Publicly, she wants to show EU leaders that the “special relationship” is alive and well, so who needs the EU? She would love to leave with the beginnings of a favorable trade deal too, but she’s negotiating with a president who does not give anything away, so she’ll be lucky to leave with vague promises of a level playing field (but don’t expect any favors at U.S. expense).

And while she’s eager to start the engines on the trade front, she is constrained by the fact that Britain hasn’t even invoked Article 50 yet to trigger the country’s process for leaving the EU. Privately, she needs assurances that the United States is not going to cut a deal with the Russians over the heads of its European allies and partners, leaving the U.K. high and dry on things like force deployments to Europe.

Britain, along with the United States and other NATO allies, will soon deploy forces to the Baltic States and Poland to shore up deterrence against Russia. That’s expensive and the British are not about to set one foot in the region if they think the United States won’t be there too — and neither will the other allies. So the bear in the room will be Russian, and Trump will need to say something reassuring to America’s closet ally about U.S. intent in Europe. If he can’t do that, one of the most important outcomes of the NATO Summit last July will unravel, as allies will balk at sending troops to the Baltics if the United States is absent.

That will not be NATO’s fault, but will belong squarely to the new administration. Finally, what is the intent of the new administration regarding the huge and successful anti-Islamic State coalition? The U.K. and France help to lead it, but will the new administration maintain the U.S. leadership role or will the U.K. be left holding the bag?

Rumors are flying about a new, more aggressive U.S. military approach to fighting the Islamic State. It would be helpful if coalition partners got an idea of what the United States is up to, and May is hoping to be the first to get a hint. Will there be a plan ready to discuss? What does Trump want from his first meeting as president with a foreign leader? Credibility.



What does Trump want from his first meeting as president with a foreign leader? Credibility. He needs the media to portray him as the leader of the alliance and as a foreign policy president worth flying across the Atlantic to confer with.

He needs the press conference at the end of the meeting to show a measured and sophisticated president in command of the issues and a gracious host to the country's most important ally. He especially needs the British to echo this as they sit with the press on the plane back to London. Anything less — a president disengaged or unprepared, glib with the issues, or who takes lightly his responsibility as leader of the alliance — will only feed the image of a president not ready for command.

Outside of the photo ops and any joint press statements, Trump will seek May's help in pushing other NATO allies to spend more on defense. In addition, he needs a commitment from her too that no matter the pressure to cut U.K. spending, she will protect her Defense Ministry's two percent from the axe.

Trump is also likely to ask May for more help in the fight against "radical Islamic extremism" (although in his pre-brief with National Security Council staff he will learn just how much the U.K. is already doing in that regard). It is probably safe to assume that China and the Trump administration's interest in taking a more aggressive stance on the economic and trade front will be part of Trump's talking points as well.

Trump no doubt sees May as a partner and expects that they will find common cause in their anti-EU stances. While May is certainly determined to chart a speedy and favorable course for Brexit, Trump may be surprised to learn that she still sees some value in the institution itself. Like all European leaders, she worries about Russian efforts to undermine not only the EU, but also other organizations, like NATO.

Outside of the substance, our allies and adversaries will be closely watching the mechanics of this meeting with the hope that they can get a better read on how the Trump administration is going to handle international engagements. Who was at the table with the president during the photo spray at the top? Who sat closest to the president? Did anyone else speak in the meeting? Did Trump read prepared remarks or speak off the cuff? What were the atmospherics?

There is a lot riding for the new administration on the success of this first meeting — and a lot riding for May too. This is not a time for off-the-cuff thinking. It's a test for which the administration needs to study.

Trump's pox Americana

Foreign Policy, 26.01.2017



America's foreign policy has changed more in the week since Donald Trump took office than it has at any time since the end of World War II. Given the changes that occurred in 1991 with the end of the Cold War and after the attacks on 9/11, that is saying something.

But the changes ushered in by Trump — often without benefit of consultation with his cabinet departments, experts of any sort, or the legislative branch of government — cut to the core philosophies that have guided America in the modern era, as well as to the specifics of relations with an extraordinarily wide array of countries and regions.

The most profound of these changes is that after almost a century of American leadership on the world stage, Trump has unabashedly sounded the retreat. Whether under the umbrella of his “America First” views, his willingness to let other powers take the lead, his distrust of international institutions, or pure ignorance, he has ushered in a shift from what was hailed as the Pax Americana to what may soon be seen as the Pox Americana, a blight befalling the world as a consequence of mean-spirited, ill-considered, short-sighted U.S. foreign policy. This can be clearly seen when we take each of the major foreign-policy actions one at a time. First, there is the shift away from the foundational concepts that have guided American foreign policy since World War II.

At the heart of American leadership since the defeat of Nazism, fascism, and the Japanese empire has been a belief in an international system of laws and institutions with the United States playing a central role. A corollary has been the ongoing commitment to promoting, preserving, and actively protecting certain core American values, which include standing up to potential global threats, rejecting aggression, promoting free markets and global trade, supporting democracy, honoring our alliances and commitments, and infusing our actions with a sense of humanity and compassion wherever possible. We have also shown a respect for science and technological progress as a force for good. Have we strayed from these principles? Of course. Have we violated them from time to time? Yes, that too.

But have we always made an effort to at least seemingly be guided by them, and have we usually sought to do so? Yes. In short order, Donald Trump has discounted serious threats, embraced aggressors, announced a reversal in international trade and economic policy (that echoes American policies of the Smoot-Hawley, pre-World War II era), embraced anti-democratic forces at home and abroad, threatened to reject or not honor alliances or treaties from NATO to NAFTA, and turned his back groundlessly on refugees and immigrants including those whose plights America has contributed to. He has also undercut our commitment to long-standing efforts to improve the world and America's standing in it — from announcing an intention to no longer support vital health programs for women to rolling back climate change mitigation policies to cutting back on international aid and support for multilateral institutions.



From the mentality of “Mr. Gorbachev, tear down that wall!” we have gone to one of building new walls that separate us from friends and vital allies. From the soaring spirit of the poetry inscribed at the base of the Statue of Liberty, we have gone to turning a deaf ear to those most in need. From the soaring spirit of the poetry inscribed at the base of the Statue of Liberty, we have gone to turning a deaf ear to those most in need.

From working to knit together Europe to help ensure its stability and ours, we have gone to supporting nationalist movements that seek to tear it down. From focusing on the Atlantic alliance as the centerpiece of U.S. security, we have a commander in chief who has posited that not only is NATO obsolete but that we may not honor its most important provision — that an attack on one is an attack on all.

From the present-at-the-creation moment at which we helped build the United Nations and the other institutions of the international order (not purely to help others, but often to advance our own interests), we have announced a policy to defund the U.N. and to undercut the international trading system.

From being the nation that used science and technology to put a man on the moon and built the internet, we have become a nation whose leader rejects science, seeks to suppress facts on government websites, and denies the indisputable global threat of climate change.

America was once a nation that was seen as actively arguing for the principles that made the country great — sometimes too actively for the taste of many around the world. We made the case for a free press; now the president assails the media, publicly attacks journalists as “the most dishonest people” on Earth, and thus sends a message to authoritarian leaders worldwide that he is a kindred spirit.

We celebrated freedom of religion; now we have become a nation that has embraced Islamophobia and seems to be taking steps to punish individuals simply because of their religious beliefs. We opposed ethno-nationalism; now we have overnight emerged as an acknowledged leader and supporter of a global movement based on nationalism and fomenting hatred of “the Other.”

Rather than seeking to preserve the sanctity of democracy and the principle of self-determination of peoples, this president has actively called for foreign governments to meddle in U.S. elections, rejected assertions that one such government, Russia, had done so despite all the evidence to the contrary, and has subsequently defended and embraced the leadership of that anti-democratic regime — as well as given comfort to many others and to dubious or rogue leaders from Syria to the Philippines.

Foundational policies that both Democratic and Republican administrations have hewed to have also been cast aside or dramatically undercut. This is the first administration since the 1930s to actively embrace and even promote the interests of the government in the Kremlin. The “One China” policy that has been a pillar of U.S. foreign policy for almost half a century was cast aside during the transition (as was the important concept that the United States had “one president at a time”).



The long-standing friendship America has had with its neighbor and one of its most important trading partners, Mexico, has been imperiled by Trump's desire to vilify Mexicans for political game and to literally erect a wall between our two countries. As noted above, America's most important alliance, NATO, has had its future thrown into doubt.

The policy of supporting right-wing, anti-EU parties in Europe (which also advances the interests of Russia) is contrary to America's long-established support for multilateralism and undercuts the economic and political strength of our allies. Our long-standing policy of siting the U.S. Embassy in Israel in Tel Aviv has been thrown into question (not for the first time ... but in a way that was, at least at first, troublingly abrupt).

While the administration of Barack Obama had a record of indecision, inaction, and a failure to protect U.S. interests in Syria and Iraq, the former president recognized Bashar al-Assad as a menace to his people and did not explicitly support Russia's intervention in support of Assad. The new president's press secretary recently announced a willingness to have U.S. forces fight alongside Russian ones in Syria (despite questions of whether or not this is even legal).

The George W. Bush administration embraced torture and rendition in a way that produced an international outcry and U.S. legislation against future abuses. The Trump team has sought a reversal in these areas as well.

All this in a week. It is made all the more worrying because candidate Trump indicated many other areas where he would deviate from long-standing, proven, sound U.S. policies — from being open to the use of nuclear weapons by U.S. allied nations in the Pacific to embracing a more hostile stance with China to entering into trade wars with important economic partners despite oceans of evidence suggesting how damaging such actions are.

And if the last week is any indication, we should expect the White House to continue to deviate from policies that have proved to be wise and effective. One friend of mine who is a smart commentator has suggested that Trump is on many issues a throwback, turning back history and perhaps emulating Ronald Reagan — who entertained some of these ideas. But I would say it is worse. Trump is ahistorical.

I think he has no idea of history. Trump is ahistorical. I think he has no idea of history. And let's remember — Reagan was fiercely tough on Russia, pro-free trade, and his policies in many areas evidence a humanity and respect for fundamental U.S. values that Trump's do not. It is also not irrelevant that Trump has less government and international experience than any president in U.S. history.

Nor is it of no consequence that his transactional approach to life to date, combined with his global business interests, creates enormous ethical challenges that could color his behavior and further lead him to deviate from what is in America's best interest.

Of course, it remains to be seen whether and how he follows through on actions taken to date or on his other threats and promises. It is unclear whether he has any real understanding of what he is doing. (Though even the most fair-minded observer could not help but think at this point that he does not.)



Perhaps once he has more of his government in place, he may solicit, get, and perhaps even heed better advice than he seems to be receiving from his “gang of five” or his own “very good brain.” But there is no question that significant damage has already been done.

Further, should it emerge that he has the ability and the inclination to institutionalize the changes he has put in place, it is undoubtedly true that by the time he leaves office, America’s standing will have fallen greatly. Make no mistake: By then, other countries will have stepped in to fill the void left by the United States, and it will take many, many years to undo the consequences of electing this impulsive, values-challenged, foreign-policy neophyte as president.



Announcements & Reports

Why is it so hard to reach the EU's 'poverty' target?

Source : Bruegel
Weblink : <http://bruegel.org/2017/01/why-is-it-so-hard-to-reach-the-eus-poverty-target/>

Political polarization and the 2016 congressional primaries

Source : Brookings
Weblink : <https://www.brookings.edu/research/political-polarization-and-the-2016-congressional-primaries/>

Will engaging China promote good governance?

Source : Brookings
Weblink : <https://www.brookings.edu/research/will-engaging-china-promote-good-governance/>

Upcoming Events

Competitive Gains in the Economic and Monetary Union

Date : 01 February 2017
Place : Brussels - Belgium
Website : <http://www.bruegel.org/nc/events/event-detail/event/534-competitive-gains-in-the-economic-and-monetary-union/>

The Future of Capitalist Democracy: UK-Japan Perspectives

Date : 11 February 2017
Place : London - UK
Website : <http://www.chathamhouse.org/event/future-capitalist-democracy-uk-japan-perspectives>

13th Asia Europe Economic Forum (AEEF)

Date : 12 February 2017
Place : Beijing - China
Website : <http://bruegel.org/events/13th-asia-europe-economic-forum/>

Emerging Markets and Europe: Time for Different Relationships?

Date : 13 February 2017
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 : 14 February 2017
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 : 15 February 2017
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 : 16 February 2017
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 : 17 February 2017
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 : 18 February 2017
Place : Lisbon - Portugal
Website : <http://bruegel.org/events/vision-europe-summit-2016/>