

## Turkey: New energy is needed in US ties

Hurriyet Daily News, 30.03.2017



New energy is needed in ties with the U.S., the Turkish government has said during U.S. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson's first official visit to the capital Ankara, voicing hope for "concrete steps" particularly in the fight against jihadists in Syria and the extradition of Pennsylvania-based Islamic preacher Fethullah Gülen.

"It's vital for us to give a new energy to the Turkey-U.S. relationship. Turkey and the U.S. have an important role to play regarding the challenges they face. Our area of responsibility is not limited to our respective regions, it is about all problems and opportunities across the world.

That's why the Turkey-U.S. friendship should be stronger than ever," Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu told a joint press conference with Tillerson in Ankara. The secretary of state was paying a one-day visit to Ankara, where he held extensive talks with President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, Prime Minister Binali Yıldırım and Çavuşoğlu. He did not meet opposition party leaders during the trip, but paid a visit to the Ankara mausoleum of the Turkish Republic's founding leader, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk.

Çavuşoğlu described Tillerson's visit as an indication of the importance attached to ties with Turkey by the U.S., underlining that the two allies should be much more influential in dealing with issues of concern to both.

Tillerson underscored the role that Turkey has been playing in its region as a NATO ally since 1952, vowing that the Trump administration was eager to continue to build ties with Turkey. He stressed that "three main goals" he was focused on during his talks in Ankara were defeating the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), bringing stability to the region, and boosting bilateral economic ties.

Çavuşoğlu noted that Ankara had "problems" with the Obama administration on "two main issues," on which it was expecting better cooperation with the Trump leadership. "One of the issues was the cooperation and support given to the PYD/YPG while fighting the DAESH," he said. Turkey considers the Syrian Kurdish Democratic Union Party (PYD) and its armed wing, the People's Protection Unit (YPG), as terror organizations and has long been pressing Washington to stop its alliance with the group in the fight against ISIL.

"In this period, we expect a better cooperation. We have once again shared our view with our friend that cooperating with one terror organization in fighting another terror group is wrong and unrealistic, and will impose more risks for the future of Syria," Çavuşoğlu said. "If we cannot defeat a terror organization of 10,000 to 20,000 men, if we are in a need of another terror band to defeat them, then we should check ourselves," he added, noting that the anti-ISIL coalition is composed of 68 countries, mostly NATO members.



The top U.S. diplomat, however, sought to avoid delivering direct answers to questions on the projected PYD role in the upcoming operation to take Raqqa, but acknowledged that Washington faced “difficult choices” in the anti-ISIL campaign.

Tillerson said there was “no space” between Turkey and the United States in their determination to defeat ISIL, stressing that “Turkey will remain a key partner for stabilization efforts” in the region. “What we discussed today are options that are available to us.

They are difficult options. Let me be very frank, it’s not easy. Difficult choices have to be made,” he added. Praising the role Turkey has played in stopping foreign fighters’ mobilization to and from Europe via its territory, Tillerson said he was focused on the creation of “stabilization zones” in Syria, adding that a number of options on how to secure such areas were being explored.

On a question about the future of Syria, Tillerson said there was more discussion to be had on the way forward, but stressed that the status of President Bashar al-Assad would be decided by the Syrian people.

He also cited Iran’s “disruptive role” in the region as a common concern of Ankara and Washington, without further elaborating. Another area of tension between the two allies is the status of Gülen and his loyalists, and Çavuşoğlu referred to Gülen’s continued presence in the U.S. despite Ankara’s continued efforts to secure his extradition.

“We have submitted all the evidence we have to the previous and current administrations. We have also put forward our demand for temporary detention and extradition,” he said, noting that he presented new documents to new U.S. Attorney General Jeff Sessions in his most recent visit to Washington. Çavuşoğlu said Turkey was now expecting “concrete moves” from the Trump administration on the issue.

# Turkey to suggest joint Raqqa operation to US during secretary of state Tillerson's visit

Hurriyet Daily News, 29.03.2017



Turkey is expecting to hear a clearer position from the United States during a top diplomat's visit to Ankara on the upcoming Raqqa operation and is planning to suggest a joint action by excluding Syrian Kurdish groups.

"I believe the U.S.'s position on the Raqqa operation will become clearer during our meetings with U.S. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson tomorrow," Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu told state-run TRT in an interview. His statement came a day before Tillerson's visit to the Turkish capital, where he is set to meet with senior Turkish officials.

Tillerson will be the most senior U.S. official visiting Turkey since the new administration took office in January. An overriding issue discussed in the meetings will be the upcoming Raqqa operation set to be carried out by the U.S.-led international coalition.

Recalling that Turkey conducted a successful strategy in clearing northern Syria of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) with the Euphrates Shield operation, Çavuşoğlu said the same strategy should be continued for Raqqa.

He stressed that conducting the operation with the Syrian Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG), which is an associate of the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), will be inconvenient as the group's purpose is not to bring stability to Syria, but to dissolve it.

Saying that not only the U.S. but also Russia is lending support to the YPG, Çavuşoğlu described the situation as the reflection of the competition between these global powers in Syria. Criticizing all these actors including the Syrian regime for pursuing inconsistent and short-term policies, Çavuşoğlu said, "These are not long-term policies for Syria's future and stability. How come both Russia and Syria can together support the YPG?"

"It's not acceptable for these countries to engage with terror organizations for whatever reason. If they say that they want to continue to work with terror organizations, it's up to them," he said. Another key issue expected to be discussed at the talks will be Turkey's persistent demand of the extradition of Fethullah Gülen, the U.S.-based leader of the Fethullahist Terror Organization (FETÖ), widely blamed for the July 2016 coup attempt.

In response to former CIA Director James Woolsey, who claimed that Turkey was planning to remove Gülen secretly from the U.S. with the help of former National Security Advisor Michael Flynn, Çavuşoğlu said that "He is a former director but what he says is total nonsense.

"We are a state, not a terror organization." He said Turkey was working with U.S. Justice Department on the extradition of Gülen and was submitting new evidence on his leadership of the failed coup. Çavuşoğlu said evidence was also given to Woolsey, accusing him of creating tension between the two countries. "Unfortunately, FETÖ did not only infiltrate institutions in Turkey but also many institutions in the U.S.," he said.

He added that the coup attempt was organized by FETÖ with the support of some groups outside Turkey. "Those who try to protect FETÖ know perfectly that the coup was plotted by FETÖ," he said.

## PM: Turkey can start new operation if necessary as Euphrates Shield ends

Reuters, 29.03.2017



Turkey has successfully completed its months-long Euphrates Shield Operation in northern Syria but can launch new military movements under a different name if necessary, the Turkish prime minister has said, adding that the life has turned to normal in places cleared of jihadists.

"After this point, if we take action in the event that our security is threatened or if action is needed against DAESH [Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant – ISIL], then it will be as part of a new operation. That means the Euphrates Shield is over and any potential actions, if necessary, will be named differently," Prime Minister Binali Yıldırım told NTV.

Yıldırım's words followed a statement issued by the National Security Council (MGK) meeting which announced the "successfully completion" of the Euphrates Shield Operation, which was launched on Aug. 24, 2016, in a bid to clear Turkey's border of ISIL and stop the Syrian Kurdish Democratic Union Party (PYD) from merging its Kobane and Afrin cantons.

"Thanks to the Euphrates Shield, we have secured an area of 2,015 square kilometers under security by capturing al-Bab. The Free Syrian Army (FSA) has been settled there. Syrians in Turkey have returned and life has returned to normal," he added.

It is not clear whether Turkey will withdraw its troops from northern Syria and when it will begin an extensive effort to create new residential areas in the region for Syrians. The announcement was issued at the biannual MGK meeting. "The Euphrates Shield Operation, launched to secure our country's border security, to prevent DEA threats and attacks from targeting our country, to give an opportunity to our displaced Syrian brothers to return their homes and to continue their lives in peace and security, has been successfully completed," the MGK said in a statement issued on March 29 following a meeting chaired by President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan.



The Turkish military supported FSA fighters with artillery and special forces during the operation. Thousands of militants were killed in the operation, according to official numbers, while more than 70 Turkish soldiers were also killed.

## Turkish PM: Turkey-EU ties to ‘relatively normalize’ after elections in Europe

Hurriyet Daily News, 27.03.2017



Relations between Turkey and European Union member states will “relatively normalize” after the completion of a series of elections in Europe, Prime Minister Binali Yıldırım said.

Meeting with the chief editors of TV broadcasters, Yıldırım said it was not correct to say “all EU states are against Turkey.” “But a few of them are conducting an active campaign against [Turkey] with regard to the constitutional amendment,” he said, referring to the government-supported bid to shift to an executive presidential system, due to be voted in a referendum on April 16.

Yıldırım warned that “Islamophobia and anti-Turkish tendencies” pose a risk to Europe, while claiming that the arguments of the Fethullahist Terror Organization (FETÖ) of U.S.-based Islamic preacher Fethullah Gülen and the outlawed Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK) are heeded over Turkey’s perspective.

Addressing President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan’s comments that Ankara will “reassess” its ties with the European Union after the April 16 referendum, Yıldırım said “the people will make the decision on issues that politics can’t decide.”

A referendum on Turkey’s EU membership bid could be held if Turkish citizens are “in confusion” about the process, he added. The prime minister also stated that Russia wants to further develop bilateral ties with Turkey, but its ongoing cooperation with the Syrian Kurdish People’s Protection Units (YPG) militia limits this collaboration.

“Russia wants to develop relations with us, but this also has boundaries. We cannot overlook those who are giving support to terrorist organizations,” he said. Asked about the U.S. plans for possible cooperation with YPG militants in the upcoming Raqqa operation, Ankara has had the necessary discussions with Washington and it is now down to the U.S. administration to make a final decision, Yıldırım stated. The U.S. administration has “not given feedback” on Turkey’s concerns about the Syrian Kurdish militia and the American military’s cooperation with the YPG is still continuing, he added.

# PYD: Raqqa could be part of Syria's 'Kurdish federation'

AFP, 27.03.2017



The northern Syrian city of Raqqa could join a decentralized system of government being set up by Syrian Kurdish groups and their allies once it is freed from Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), a Syrian Kurdish politician said.

Raqqa, ISIL's main urban base of operations in Syria, is the focus of campaign by the U.S.-backed SDF, which mainly consist of Syrian Kurdish YPG militants. Saleh Muslim, the co-chair of the Syrian Kurdish PYD, which is the political wing of the YPG, said it would be up to the people of Raqqa to decide their future once the city is freed from ISIL, but he thinks the city will join the "democratic federal" system.

The YPG already controls swathes of northern Syria, where Kurdish groups and their allies are working to establish a decentralized system of government in areas captured from ISIL, which declared a "caliphate" that has been centered on Raqqa.

The political project is causing deep alarm in Turkey, which sees the PYD, and its armed wing YPG, as an extension of the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) and considers them as terrorists. "We expect [this] because our project is for all Syria ... and Raqqa can be part of it," Muslim told Reuters said in a telephone interview. "Our only concern is that the people of Raqqa are the ones who take the decision on everything."

The "democratic federal" system aims to build on three autonomous areas set up by the main Kurdish groups in the north. The blueprint for the new system of government was approved by a constituent assembly in December 20146.

Turkey has repeatedly said it would not allow a "Kurdish corridor" in Syria's north and warned that it would intervene militarily if such efforts continue. The Euphrates Shield Operation, launched last August by the Turkish military, targeted both ISIL and YPG militants across Turkey's southern border.

Muslim added that Raqqa needed to be in "friendly hands" otherwise it would form a "danger to all Syria, particularly northern Syria, the federal system of northern Syria, the areas of self-administration."

# US helicopters, special ops take part in Syrian militia airlift

Reuters, 23.03.2017



Forces such as Apache helicopters, U.S. Marine artillery and special operation troops were part of a U.S.-led coalition operation to air drop Syrian militia into an area near the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant's (ISIL) stronghold Raqqa, a U.S. official said.

The air drop of Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) near the town of Tabqa in northern Syria was the first time the coalition had carried out such a mission, Colonel Joseph Scrocca, a spokesman for the US-led coalition helping local fighters, told reporters, according to Reuters.

Tabqa Dam at the southern end of Lake Assad is about 55 kilometers west of Raqqa, which ISIL views as the capital of its supposed "caliphate." The ISIL-held facility provides electricity to much of the region and its destruction would result in widespread flooding.

Scrocca said U.S. support came overnight May 21-May 22 via Apache helicopter gunships, airlifts, air strikes and advice to the SDF, an Arab-Kurdish alliance. A U.S. Marine artillery battery is also helping out, AFP reported. In a first, U.S. forces helicoptered an unspecified number of Arab SDF troops to Taqba, meaning they are now behind ISIL lines as they try to secure the dam.

Scrocca said the area around it is effectively a "command and control center for terrorist attacks against the West" and home to numerous foreign fighter training camps. "Seizing Tabqa will give the SDF a strategic advantage and a launching point needed for the liberation" of Raqqa, Scrocca said.

The SDF has been working for months to encircle Raqqa before pushing into the city proper. He said that about 75 to 80 percent of the forces air dropped were members of the Syrian Arab Coalition group and the remainder were from another part of the SDF, some of whom were Kurdish fighters.

"DOD: Last night, U.S. military forces supported multi-pronged offensive by Syrian Democratic Forces behind #ISIS lines to secure Tabqa Dam. U.S. military support included air movement & strikes, Apache close air support, Marine artillery, & special ops advice and assistance. Seizing Tabqa Dam will further isolate #Raqqa and deny #ISIS the ability to move fighters and supplies to defend dwindling strongholds," tweeted Brett McGurk, special presidential envoy for Global Coalition to Counter ISIL.

The U.S.-led coalition fighting ISIL in Syria faces "tough decisions" on how much it should support Kurdish fighters in an offensive to reclaim Raqqa from the jihadists, Senator John McCain, who heads the Senate Armed Services Committee, said on March 22.

He said the Trump administration was weighing the thorny issue of giving the Kurds heavy arms and a major role in the upcoming battle, which would infuriate key ally Turkey, who sees the People's Protection Unit (YPG), an offshoot of the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK).

"The conundrum is that if you don't use the Kurds, [the battle] takes a lot longer," McCain told reporters. "But if you do, you have an enormous challenge as far as relations with Turkey are concerned, including things like the use of ncirlik," he added, referring to the Turkish air base used heavily by the coalition to hit ISIL targets in northern Syria.

McCain said he met recently with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, and the two spoke about the Kurdish issue. Meanwhile, U.S. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson said on March 22 the United States would set up "interim zones of stability" to help refugees return home in the next phase of the fight against ISIL and al-Qaeda in Syria and Iraq.

The top U.S. diplomat did not make clear where these zones were to be set up. He was addressing a meeting of 68 countries and organizations gathered in Washington to discuss accelerating the battle against ISIL.

"The United States will increase our pressure on ISIS and al-Qaeda and will work to establish interim zones of stability, through ceasefires, to allow refugees to return home," Tillerson told the gathering at the State Department, where the former oil executive was hosting his first major diplomatic event. Turkey has long promoted the establishment of a terror-free safe zone inside Syria for refugees to come back and settle in.

## Scottish parliament to defy UK and back independence vote

Bloomberg, 28.03.2017



Scottish First Minister Sturgeon is expected to win backing for her plan to pursue a second independence referendum in a parliamentary vote that comes a day before the U.K. triggers two years of talks on withdrawing from the EU.

Lawmakers in Edinburgh will vote around 5 p.m. local time, with the Greens already saying they will support Sturgeon's Scottish National Party to ensure a majority in the semi-autonomous Scottish Parliament. Sturgeon is seeking permission to request the legal means from the U.K. authorities to hold the plebiscite by spring 2019, saying circumstances have changed Britain is pulling out of the EU.





The vote, which was postponed from last week because of the terrorist attack outside the U.K. Parliament in London, sets up what could be a lengthy and acrimonious domestic showdown in the midst of the Brexit negotiations. U.K. Prime Minister Theresa May met Sturgeon on a visit to Scotland on Monday and has repeatedly rebuffed the plan for another Scottish referendum.

“When that change is imposed on us, we should have the right to choose,” Sturgeon told Scottish lawmakers at the start of Tuesday’s debate. “None of us should be in any doubt what’s at stake. The people of Scotland must also have their say.”

The dispute over who has the right to decide Scotland’s future and when is thus set to rumble on, and that might suit both parties for now. Sturgeon is trying to build support in the polls for independence after being defeated in 2014, a year when the Scottish economy was performing better and the price of North Sea oil was almost twice what it is today.

The Conservative Party, which governs the U.K. though is the largest opposition group in the Scottish Parliament, says no referendum should take place, not least because there’s no public or political consent for one. Ruth Davidson, the party’s leader in Scotland, told lawmakers Sturgeon is trying to “spin some rationale” for her referendum timetable.

May said this month that “now is not the time” for a vote and wants to complete the pullout from the EU first. She argued that the SNP government’s plan to hold a referendum as early as the fall of next year would not give voters enough time to see the results of her Brexit negotiations.

Sturgeon said last week that she’s open to discussions on the timing of the vote if the U.K. presents “a clear alternative and the rationale for it,” though she insisted that she has a mandate to call a referendum because Brexit means the status quo is no longer an option.

Should the Edinburgh legislature vote as expected, the Scottish government will then issue a so-called Section 30 request to the U.K. for the temporary transfer of power to hold another plebiscite, using the previous as precedent.

Scots voted 55 percent to 45 percent to stay in the U.K. the last time and then 62 percent to 38 percent to remain in the EU in June last year. Bookmaker William Hill Plc puts the chances of another vote by the end of 2020 at 65 percent and that Scots will choose independence when the time comes.

# Britain finally pulls the Brexit trigger

Foreign Policy, 29.03.2017



The end of the Brexit beginning is here. On Wednesday, British Prime Minister Theresa May officially sent the European Union her country's divorce papers, thus beginning the formal process of unmooring the United Kingdom from the European Union.

Britain's surprise decision to leave the European Union during a referendum in June, 2016 rattled the European Union to its core. After nearly seven decades of forging the continent's institutional unity, it finally showed signs of cracking. It has also presented both Brussels and London with a sharp legal and political headache.

The EU has over 40,000 EU regulations, 15,000 EU court verdicts, and 60,000 international standards that Britain will somehow have to entangle itself from, on issues ranging from immigration to healthcare to commerce to foreign policy to trade — one of the most important issues given Britain's reliance on the Eurozone market.

And they'll be negotiating against the clock: Brussels and London have two years from Wednesday's formal notification to sort out their divorce based on the so-called exit clause of the EU's Treaty of Lisbon. If they don't reach a final agreement on Britain's withdrawal terms, all EU rules will suddenly no longer apply to Britain. This could pit the country in political and financial uncertainty.

Some British lawmakers fear they won't be able to meet the deadline. The EU can extend negotiations, but only if all 27 members agree, which isn't guaranteed. (But don't worry, chief Brexiteer Nigel Farage said he'd just leave Britain if the Brexit he orchestrated is a disaster, so at least he'll be okay.)

The UK's ambassador to the EU, Tim Barrow, had the distinctly awkward honors of handing May's official Brexit letter to European Council President Donald Tusk in Brussels Wednesday:

May struck a "let's still be friends" tone in the letter. "We are leaving the European Union, but we are not leaving Europe — and we want to remain committed partners and allies to our friends across the continent," she wrote.

She followed the letter with a speech before parliament, taking on a resolved tone to compensate for the sea of uncertainty she's mired in. "Today the government acts on the democratic will of the British people," May said in a speech to Parliament after Barrow handed in her letter. "This is an historic moment from which there can be no turning back. Britain is leaving the European Union," she said. But while the United Kingdom breaks from the EU, it's grappling to keep its own kingdom united. On Tuesday, Scotland demanded a new referendum on independence from London once the terms of Brexit became clearer. The British government rejected Scotland's bid.

In Brussels, the initial shock of the June, 2016 Brexit referendum wore off well before Wednesday. As one Politico Europe story puts it: “the mood in the European capital has largely shifted to ‘don’t let the door hit you on the way out.’” But Tusk was clearly still hurt. “There is no reason to pretend that this is a happy day, neither in Brussels, nor in London. After all, most Europeans, including almost half the British voters wish that we would stay together, not drift apart. As for me I will not pretend that I am happy today,” he said. “What can I add? We already miss you,” he said.

## For Tillerson, showing up at NATO isn’t enough

Foreign Policy, 30.03.2017



**Bowing to outside pressure, Secretary of State Rex Tillerson is set to attend his first meeting with NATO’s foreign ministers on Friday. But that was not his initial plan.**

**Scheduling problems originally gave the secretary of state two bad options: go to NATO and miss Chinese President Xi Jinping’s visit to the United States (not good, given criticism that he is already turning into a no-show secretary) or stay home and send acting Deputy Secretary of State Thomas Shannon (sending the signal, “I see enough of you guys and NATO is a second tier priority”). These scheduling conflicts happen all the time and usually get worked out.**

But here’s the kicker — NATO offered new dates and the State Department initially said no thanks. That message from Tillerson — essentially, “I’ll see you after my trip to Moscow” — got everyone riled up. The Swamp rose up as one in protest and sent Tillerson a strong counter message: You don’t see allies only after you’ve seen the Russians!

A few hours later State backed down. And so Tillerson will be in Brussels this Friday, no doubt miffed and with hat in hand. The lesson here is that leadership means showing up. While other ministers can opt out, that is not an option for the United States.

But Tillerson must do more than just show up. Now that he will attend the NATO Ministerial — NATO’s last big meeting before its summit on May 25 — the question is whether he will lead the alliance or just go through the motions, doing crossword puzzles as allies drone on? If he plans to lead, he will need to arrive armed with new ideas and fresh energy to take the alliance forward, and away from supposed obsolescence. But if he arrives just to fill the seat, that would be the worst of all — it would be better if he had not shown up at all.

At a minimum, Tillerson should lay the intellectual and policy foundation for President Donald Trump’s attendance at the NATO summit in May. At a minimum, Tillerson should lay the intellectual and policy foundation for President Donald Trump’s attendance at the NATO summit in May.



Tillerson could provide the strategic underpinnings for the administration's worldview — especially the role of the United States in Europe. We've heard the criticism, but what's the positive outlook from the transatlantic leader? That could set up Trump to announce in May the specific plans he has in regard for NATO and in tackling burden sharing.

Tillerson could also lift the veil a bit on the U.S. relationship with Russia, especially as it relates to deterrence in Europe. He has to say something about Russia, given his upcoming trip there. And it's probably easier for Tillerson to talk with allies about Russia than for Trump to do so.

In addition to talking about Russia, foreign ministers will talk about ongoing NATO missions, such as NATO troops in the Baltics and Poland, NATO trainers in Iraq helping fight the Islamic State, NATO naval forces dealing with the worsening migrant tragedy in the Mediterranean, and NATO experts helping to establish governance in Libya. These missions show that NATO is not obsolete — but yes, NATO could certainly do more.

This is the area for a new push led by the United States. For instance, NATO could convene and host the counter-Islamic State coalition meetings currently being managed by the United States — there is no reason that the Defense Department and State Department have to run those meetings out of their back pockets.

But NATO could especially do more in the post-conflict stage both in Iraq and in Syria. The rebuilding of those two nations will be a huge undertaking that cannot be done by the U.N. or any nation or coalition alone. NATO could take the initiative to work with the U.N. and the EU to begin sketching out how to help Iraq and Syria deal with the humanitarian needs born of years at war.

But most importantly, Tillerson can help Trump's first NATO summit be a success by taking off the table any lingering doubt or suspicion about U.S. leadership of the transatlantic community. This is a leadership role important for the United States and a priority for presidents going back to Harry Truman.

The United States leads the transatlantic community because America derives important benefits from its partnership with Europe. Perhaps the most important benefit for the United States is that Europe and America see the world in a similar way and share an understanding that — at a time when these common values are increasingly threatened — we need a strong and cooperative community to see our way through. The United States does not have to face these challenges by itself; unless it willfully drives partners away, or allows the transatlantic community to atrophy through benign neglect.



# Trump moves to roll back Obama climate measures

Hurriyet Daily News, 30.03.2017



President Donald Trump declared the end of a “war on coal” March 28, as he moved to curb rules that underpin American emissions targets and a major global climate accord.

Following through on an election promise, Trump signed an order to review some of his predecessor Barack Obama’s climate legacy, declaring an end to “job-killing regulations.” In a maiden trip to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), he ordered a review of emission limits for coal-fired power plants and eased up restrictions on federal leasing for coal production. Trump said the measures herald “a new era in American energy and production and job creation.”

Critics say that rolling back Obama’s Clean Power Plan is unlikely to result in a boost to production or to create substantial numbers of jobs. America’s coal industry has long been in decline, with natural gas, cheap renewable energy, automation and tricky geology making the sooty fuel a less lucrative prospect.

In 2008 there were 88,000 coal miners in the United States, according to the U.S. Energy Information Administration. Today, the number of coal miners has fallen around 25 percent. More people work in Whole Foods, an upscale supermarket chain. But some experts and environmental groups warned Trump’s order could be the opening salvo of an effort to undermine internationally agreed targets under the Paris Climate Accord.

Curbing emissions from coal-fired power plants was a pillar of America’s commitment to cut carbon emissions by 26-28 percent by 2025. “It will make it virtually impossible” for the U.S. to meet its target said Bob Ward, a climate specialist at the London School of Economics.

The Trump administration has not said whether it will pull out of the Paris deal. “Whether we stay in or not is still under discussion,” a senior administration official told AFP. Energy giant Exxon Mobil has asked the Trump administration not to scrap U.S. participation in the pact.

And veterans of the Obama administration played down the impact of Trump’s actions. Obama’s former chief environmental advisor described the executive order as “terrible” but said “it isn’t the ball game.”

He added that any damage can be mitigated in the courts and in states, which are tasked with coming up with emissions reduction plans. And “even if the Trump administration wants to pretend for the time being that climate change is not a big deal, people all over the world think it is a really big deal,” said Todd Stern, who led U.S. climate negotiators from 2009-2016.



Already the states of California and New York -- two of the most populous states -- have said they will press ahead with climate mitigation plans. During the 2016 election campaign Trump donned a hard hat and embraced miners from Kentucky to West Virginia, promising to return jobs to long-ravaged communities. He won both states by a landslide.

Miners were by his side again on March 28. "Our incredible coal miners, we love our coal miners, great people," he said. Trump's words may have been less well received in the corridors of the EPA's imposing Washington headquarters.

His repeated questioning of humans' role in warming the planet had prompted environmentalist critics to charge the fox is guarding the hen house. Trump has done little to assuage those fears, vowing to slash EPA funding by a third, appointing anti-climate litigator Scott Pruitt as head of the EPA and Exxon's CEO Rex Tillerson as Secretary of State.

But Trump's climate skepticism has struck a chord with many Republican voters. Some 68 percent of Americans believe climate change is caused by humans, but just 40 percent of Republicans say they worry about it, according to Gallup. Some experts warn the economic payoff from abandoning Obama's Clean Power Plan will be limited.

"In my view, it will have virtually no impact," said professor James Van Nostrand of West Virginia University, who said the decline of coal had more to do with higher mining costs and cheaper natural gas and renewables.

"Defunding or dismantling the EPA and repealing its regulations is not going to bring the coal industry back." "The constant narrative about the 'war on coal' and the alleged devastating impact of EPA's regulations on West Virginia's coal industry will now be exposed for its inherent speciousness," he predicted.

Referring to the plan, the senior administration official told AFP: "It's going to take some time." The United States is the world's second largest polluter. Around 37 percent of domestic carbon dioxide emissions come from electricity generation.



# Announcements & Reports

## *Europe in a new world order*

**Source** : Bruegel  
**Weblink** : <http://bruegel.org/2017/02/europe-in-a-new-world-order/>

## *Maintaining Arctic Cooperation with Russia*

**Source** : Rand  
**Weblink** : [http://www.rand.org/pubs/research\\_reports/RR1731.html](http://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR1731.html)

## *The unprecedented expansion of the global middle class*

**Source** : Brookings  
**Weblink** : <https://www.brookings.edu/research/the-unprecedented-expansion-of-the-global-middle-class-2/>

# Upcoming Events

## *Views from a former president: Taiwan's past, present and future*

**Date** : 7 March 2017  
**Place** : Washington DC – United States  
**Website** : <https://www.brookings.edu/events/views-from-a-former-president-taiwans-past-present-and-future/>

## *The geopolitical impact of China's economic diplomacy*

**Date** : 8 March 2017  
**Place** : Washington DC – United States  
**Website** : <https://www.brookings.edu/events/the-geopolitical-impact-of-chinas-economic-diplomacy/>

## *India – Middle East Relations in the Asian Century*

**Date** : 12 March 2017  
**Place** : Doha - Qatar  
**Website** : <https://www.brookings.edu/events/india-middle-east-relations-in-the-asian-century/>

## *Repeal, Replace, Repair, or Improve? The Future of the ACA*

**Date** : 17 March 2017  
**Place** : Washington DC – United States  
**Website** : <http://www.rand.org/congress/activities/2017/03/17.html>



## *Conversations On The Future Of Europe*

**Date** : 22 March 2017  
**Place** : Brussels - Belgium  
**Website** : <http://bruegel.org/events/conversations-on-europe/>