



Written by [Bob Adelman](#) on December 13, 2016

Trump Names ExxonMobil Chief Rex Tillerson Secretary of State

On Tuesday President-elect Donald Trump [named](#) ExxonMobil CEO Rex Tillerson (shown on left) to the top spot in his Cabinet, secretary of state, calling him “among the most accomplished business leaders and international deal makers in the world.”

Trump had high praise for Tillerson’s accomplishments, stating:

Rex Tillerson’s career is the embodiment of the American dream. Through hard work, dedication and smart deal making, Rex rose through the ranks to become CEO of ExxonMobil, one of the world’s largest and most respected companies.

Rex knows how to manage a global enterprise, which is crucial to running a successful State Department.



The State Department employs 70,000 people around the globe, with a budget of nearly \$70 billion annually. As CEO of ExxonMobil, Tillerson ran a \$350 billion company employing 75,000 people worldwide. From there, the comparisons end. His role will change sharply from “deal maker” to “peace maker” in some of the most dangerous parts of the world.

He came from nowhere, with former Governor Mitt Romney, former Ford CEO Alan Mulally, former CIA Director David Petraeus, Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairman Bob Corker, former UN Ambassador John Bolton, and California Congressman Dana Rohrabacher all ahead of him on Trump’s “short list.” But in late November former Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice (under George Bush) visited the Trump Tower to urge the president-elect to consider seriously the ExxonMobil CEO. Robert Gates, former secretary of defense under George Bush, seconded Rice’s motion and within a few days Trump had Tillerson at the top of that list.

Trump’s selection surprised David Mordock, a former director of international economic affairs on President Obama’s National Security Council. Tillerson’s nomination “ironically continues something that really started in the Clinton State Department ... economic statecraft. The fact [is] that U.S. CEOs ... have been some of our best diplomats overseas.”

Tillerson, if confirmed by the Senate (which could be problematic thanks to his close ties to Russia dating back to the 1990s under Boris Yeltsin), would face a myriad of issues:

- The Iran nuclear deal;
- His support of the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), contrasting sharply with Trump’s widely expressed criticism of it;



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- His support of a carbon tax as “the most efficient means to reflecting the cost of carbon in all economic decisions;”
- His opposition to sanctions as a foreign policy tool;
- His middle-of-the-road position on climate change (that humans affect climate change but “to what extent and ... what you can do about it?”), which would impact
- His position on the international Paris climate-change agreement;
- The newly established relationship with Communist Cuba;
- The volatile Middle East, where Russia and Iran are providing military support for Assad’s regime in Syria, which is anathema to U.S. allies in the region; and
- The “one-China” policy recently challenged by his new boss, just for starters.

On social issues, Tillerson holds positions that remain controversial. Active in the Boy Scouts since he became an Eagle Scout, Tillerson served as president of the Boy Scouts of America from 2010 to 2012. Afterward he took a pivotal role in changing the group’s stance on homosexuality, with the left-wing Center for Strategic and International Studies (where he serves as a trustee) calling him “a key leader in helping the group come to a consensus.”

Although not a member of the internationalist Council on Foreign Relations, he expressed his support for that group’s agenda. Speaking at a CFR event in March 2007, Tillerson stated: “Like the Council’s founders, I believe we must choose the course of greater international engagements.”

On the issue of Common Core, Tillerson took to the pages of the *Wall Street Journal* in September 2013 to promote it as “an opportunity to reverse” the downward trend in American public education: “Leaders from government and business, and parents, need to defend the Common Core State Standards, which have been adopted wholly or in part by dozens of states.”

One of the key issues that could derail his nomination is his close ties to Russia and its current president, Vladimir Putin. In 2011, Tillerson struck a deal with Putin to drill offshore in the Arctic Ocean — a deal that potentially could be worth \$300 billion in revenues. ExxonMobil began drilling in the Kara Sea in the summer of 2014, sinking more than a billion dollars of company money into the project before being forced to abandon it thanks to U.S. sanctions levied following the Ukrainian crisis. Nevertheless, for his efforts, Tillerson received the Order of Friendship from Putin.

That’s a sticking point for Erick Erickson, the primary blogger at RedState.com and long an opponent of Trump, who stated:

We should be troubled with Tillerson’s close ties to Vladimir Putin at a time [when] there are credible reports that Russia tried to influence the American election....

Putin has a history of murdering dissidents, assassinating other world leaders, and invading European countries. He cannot be trusted.

What are the parameters of Tillerson’s friendship with Putin? The Senate should seriously explore this issue.

There’s little doubt that Democrats and Republicans in the Senate will do precisely that.

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