

Questions for Rex Tillerson, Nominee for Secretary of State



**The National
Security Program**

In December, Donald Trump nominated ExxonMobil CEO Rex Tillerson to be Secretary of State. The Senate Foreign Relations Committee will hold a hearing on January 11th and 12th to review his qualifications and the Administration's policies. This memo provides a brief biography of the nominee and a list of questions senators could ask him during the confirmation process.

Biography

Rex Tillerson received his Bachelor of Science degree in civil engineering from the University of Texas at Austin in 1975 and joined Exxon Company, U.S.A. that same year. He's worked for the company ever since, gradually moving up to the position of CEO of ExxonMobil Corporation in 2006. After his nomination, it was announced that he would retire as CEO at the end of 2016. In his various positions with Exxon, he was responsible for the company's holdings in Russia, particularly those in the Caspian Sea and offshore of Sakhalin Island. He is a member of the executive committee and former chairman of the American Petroleum Institute. In

2013, Russian President Vladimir Putin awarded him the Order of Friendship, an honor bestowed by the Kremlin on those who have engaged in various “praiseworthy” actions, including facilitating economic development projects.

Questions

Russia

Russia is running an influence campaign against the West, including the U.S., to delegitimize governing institutions and weaken democratic states from within. In doing so, they are supporting both witting and unwitting proxies within states and online who disseminate embarrassing information, misinformation, or extreme viewpoints aimed at weakening the credibility of elected leaders. Domestically, since the rise of Vladimir Putin, the Kremlin has increasingly suppressed dissent and exercised control over the media, heightened fines for those participating in unauthorized protests, and developed a tighter grip on non-governmental and civil society organizations. Furthermore, the state has broadly interpreted laws, particularly so-called “anti-extremism” laws, to prevent dissent.

- Have you been briefed on the intelligence community’s assessment that Russia interfered in the 2016 U.S. presidential election? Have you been briefed on the actions that the Obama Administration has taken against the Russians? Will you recommend to President Trump that his Administration continue those actions?
- Do you believe further actions are necessary to respond to Russia’s interference in the U.S. election and ongoing hacking efforts?
- The scale of Russia’s intervention in our elections and in the democratic processes of our allies is unprecedented. It warrants a serious investigation and response. Will you support a State Department review of Russia’s interference in Western-style democracies like France, Germany, and the Netherlands?

- Will you commit to meeting this committee in both open and closed sessions to further discuss Russia's interference in Western democracies and ways to combat such meddling?
- In what ways will the State Department work with the private sector—including internet media sources and social media platforms—to address the threat from Russian interference?
- In 2013, funding for the State Department's Title VIII program, which bolstered American expertise on Russia and Eastern Europe, was significantly cut. This program provided funding for Americans to receive language training and conduct research on Russia and neighboring countries, providing a foundation of expertise on the region. Do you believe the State Department has sufficient Russia experts and resources to address Russian aggression? Do you agree this funding should be increased?
- As you know, in 2014 the U.S. and EU imposed sanctions on Russia for invading Ukraine. ExxonMobil reportedly lost \$1 billion because of these sanctions. The Wall Street Journal reported that "Friends and associates said few U.S. citizens are closer to Mr. Putin" than you.¹ Does the Administration still support imposing sanctions against Russia for violating Ukraine's sovereignty?
- At an Exxon shareholders meeting in 2014, you said, "We always encourage the people who are making those decisions to consider the very broad collateral damage of who are they really harming with sanctions."² What do you believe would have been an appropriate response to Russia's invasion of another country, if not sanctions? How would you recommend the US respond if Russia were to invade a country like Georgia or one of the Baltic states?

NATO

During the presidential campaign, President-elect Trump called NATO “obsolete” and said the U.S. would not come to the defense of our NATO allies unless they paid their dues—despite the fact that NATO remains the U.S.’s most important military alliance and our allies came to the U.S.’s defense after 9/11.

- Will the U.S. remain a part of the NATO alliance?
- If a NATO ally, like one of the Baltic states, invokes Article V, the collective self-defense clause, in response to Russian aggression, would you recommend that the U.S. defend them militarily?
- How can the U.S. reassure our allies of our commitment to NATO?

Iran

The nuclear deal with Iran, while imperfect, stops Iran from acquiring a nuclear weapon and ensures inspectors are in the country to verify compliance. President-elect Trump has repeatedly called for breaking the deal or renegotiating it.

- The deal insures that international inspectors have robust access to suspected Iranian nuclear sites. What will you do as Secretary of State to ensure that the verification regime is as strong as possible?
- President-elect Trump called the nuclear deal a disaster and said he would dismantle or renegotiate it. What do you think would be the consequences of dismantling the agreement? What effect do you think it would have on inspection and verification efforts? What do you expect the likely response from our allies would be to efforts at sanctioning Iran if the U.S. dismantled the deal?

- As you know, nuclear-related sanctions imposed on Iran are waived by the President—but they're still on the books, since Congress isn't required to lift them until year 10. President Obama has been waiving these sanctions every 90 days as Iran complies with the deal, in order for the U.S. to hold up its side of the bargain. In April, another waiver will need to be issued. Will President-elect Trump issue such a waiver and prevent the collapse of the deal?
- IAEA Director Amano said that member states need to contribute more than \$10 million a year in order to verify the Iran nuclear deal. Will the Administration ensure enough funding is made available to verify Iran is not acquiring nuclear weapons capabilities?

Terrorism

The President-elect has repeatedly refused to articulate his strategy to defeat ISIS and has claimed to know more than U.S. generals do. But as we have seen repeatedly in Iraq, restoring stability in the Middle East to prevent the rise of terrorism requires more than just a military solution. The greatest terrorist threat to the U.S. is homegrown terrorists who are radicalized online. This is a threat the nation must address, and the Obama Administration has taken a robust approach to countering terrorist messaging.

- Last year, the State Department changed its approach to terrorist messaging, creating the Global Engagement Center. This office focuses on providing partner countries and non-governmental organizations with the resources and technology platforms to counter terrorist propaganda.
- Will this work to combat terrorist messaging continue under the new Administration?
- The Trump transition team has asked for the names of State Department employees who work on countering violent extremism programs. What was this intended for?

- Will you appoint a new director for the Global Engagement Center?
- In what other ways do you see the Administration tackling the broader issue of defeating ISIS and like-minded terrorist groups online?

Nuclear Weapons

Nuclear weapons pose the greatest security threat to the nation. Two nuclear states in particular pose a great risk to global security—North Korea, a rogue state going nuclear, and Pakistan, a nuclear state that could go rogue. These states have helped others gain nuclear weapons technology and have engaged in some troubling actions: in North Korea's case, hacking Sony Pictures, and in Pakistan's case, a series of close relationships with the Taliban in Afghanistan.

- What should be done to prevent North Korea from further developing its nuclear weapons program? Should the U.S. withdraw preconditions for six-party talks to resume?
- The U.S. worked with China last year to sanction North Korea for its provocations, but such sanctions haven't prevented North Korea's nuclear weapon and ballistic missile tests. How should the U.S. work with China to put pressure on its neighbor and prevent its destabilizing activities?
- During the presidential campaign, President-elect Trump suggested that South Korea and Japan should acquire their own nuclear weapons so the U.S. doesn't have to aid in defending them against North Korea. Does the Administration support South Korea and Japan acquiring nuclear weapons?

- President-elect Trump has said some very disturbing things in regards to nuclear weapons. He's said the U.S. needs to be more unpredictable when it comes to the use of nuclear weapons, and he openly questioned why the U.S. makes nuclear weapons if we don't use them. Will the Administration make any changes to U.S. nonproliferation policy?
- Will the Administration support a "no first use" policy, pledging not to use nuclear weapons against an adversary unless the U.S. is attacked first?
- President-elect Trump was very complimentary of Pakistan during his call with Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif. What will the Administration's policy be toward Pakistan regarding its nuclear program? How will the Administration balance the need to aid our partner in countering terrorism against preventing the expansion of its nuclear program?

TOPICS

FOREIGN RELATIONS 115

TERRORISM 98

END NOTES

1. Bradley Olson, "Rex Tillerson, a Candidate for Secretary of State, Has ties to Vladimir Putin," *The Wall Street Journal*, December 6, 2016. Accessed December 27, 2016. Available at: <http://www.wsj.com/articles/donald-trump-candidate-for-state-has-close-ties-to-vladimir-putin-1481033938>
2. Julia Borger, "Rex Tillerson: An Appointment that Confirms Putin's U.S. Election Win," *The Guardian*, December 13, 2016. Accessed December 28, 2016. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2016/dec/11/rex-tillerson-secretary-of-state-trump-russia-putin>