
III. Coup and Counter-Coup

Tillerson Charts a Course Toward a New Era of International Collaboration for Peaceful Growth

by Stanley Ezrol

Aug. 6—Secretary of State Rex Tillerson met with journalists at the State Department Aug. 1, to update and clarify the nature of the Trump Administration’s foreign policy. This discussion came at a time when most news media in the United States were presenting an image of an administration wracked with chaotic internal conflicts, while being aggressively investigated for illegal collusion with Russia and China in opposition to the interests of the United States.

These reports would have one think that top personnel in the administration were constantly at odds with each other, with the aspirations of the American people, and with the interests of the United States. In this situation, Secretary Tillerson presented a sweeping discussion of current policy, policy which could create great new possibilities in world affairs over the next fifty years, in the context of reviewing the major historic developments of the last fifty.

Although a complete [transcript of his remarks and a video](#) are available through the State Department, most news media chose to cover mere scraps of Tillerson’s remarks, to contribute to the notion that U.S. foreign policy is hopelessly confused. Tillerson acknowledged that we are confronted with grave difficulties, but his remarks, together with the decisive signing statements President Trump issued the next day rejecting the attempt by Congress to destroy our positive relations with China and Russia with unconstitutional sanctions, ought to make it clear that we now have a Secretary of State and a Presidency with a mature commitment to a strategy of global cooperation such as we have not seen in decades.



Xinhua/Bao Dandan

U.S. State Secretary Rex Tillerson delivers a speech to State Department employees in Washington, D.C., May 3, 2017.

Tillerson began by emphasizing that the Trump Administration is unalterably committed to “Making America Great Again,” but emphasized that when President Trump says, “America first,” he does not mean “America alone.” He explained that despite difficulties, disagreements, and potential conflicts, the administration is committed to mutually beneficial collaboration on areas of agreement, and avoidance of open conflict over situations where collaboration is not achievable. Much of his presentation explained how the administration is approaching each major area of tension in the world on that basis.

He added that looking back 50 years, there was a major change at the end of the cold war, and that major changes—most notably what he called a “pivot point” due to the dramatic expansion of China’s role in the world—continue to occur. In these areas of change

Tillerson noted that President Trump has challenged many of the policies he's inherited. Tillerson gave assurances that the administration is not necessarily "throwing these things away," but asking, "How should we define these relationships to serve the American people's interest, obviously, first and foremost? But in doing so, I think we're confident it serves the global interest and the interest of our partners and allies as well."

North Korea

Tillerson elaborated that the development of administration policy toward North Korea starts with a campaign of "peaceful pressure" to avoid other options that he described as "not particularly attractive." He indicated that the administration hoped that this approach would "develop a willingness [for North Korea] to sit and talk with us and others, but with an understanding that a condition of those talks is that there is no future where North Korea holds nuclear weapons or the ability to deliver those nuclear weapons to anyone in the region, much less to the homeland." The administration engaged China in this effort because "we share the same objective, a denuclearized Korean Peninsula" and because China, which accounts for 90% of North Korea's international trade "can put pressure on and influence the North Korean regime in ways that no one else can." Perhaps to answer China's objection that North Korea's quarrel is primarily with the United States, and that U.S. actions cannot be effective without changes in the relations of the United States with North Korea—particularly in light of the history of the U.S. assault against Iraq and Libya—Tillerson explained that in our relations with North Korea "we do not seek a regime change; we do not seek the collapse of the regime; we do not seek an accelerated reunification of the peninsula; we do not seek an excuse to send our military north of the 38th parallel. And we're trying to convey to the North Koreans we are not your enemy, we are not your threat, but you are presenting an unacceptable threat to us, and we have to respond."



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U.S. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson (right) and Secretary of Defense James Mattis give a press briefing after the U.S.-China Diplomatic and Security Dialogue in Washington, D.C., June 21, 2017.

China

After addressing the North Korea crisis, Tillerson turned to the issue of China, explaining "I think it's important that everyone understand that North Korea does not define the relationship with China." He recounted the opening up of U.S./China relationships fifty years ago, during the Nixon Administration, and the commitment to collaboration established at the Mar-a-Lago summit between Presidents Trump and Xi Jinping. He then referred to the "pivot point" defined by the fact that China is now the second largest economy in the world, "and they will continue to grow in their importance to the global economy," then asking, "What should define this relationship for the next 50 years?" This, he said, should be based on ensuring "economic prosperity to the benefit of both countries and the world," and that inevitable differences are resolved "in a way that does not lead to open conflict."

Then he referred to the disputes over the South China Sea, which the U.S. media and others have painted as a major threat to the peace and security of the United States and the nations in the area, remarking simply, "And where we have differences—in the South China Sea, and we have some trading differences that need to be addressed—can we work through those differences in a way without it leading to open conflict, and find the solutions that are necessary to serve us both?"

He pointed to the four high-level dialogues estab-

lished at Mar-a-Lago. The first, the Diplomatic and Security Dialogue led by Tillerson, Secretary of Defense James Mattis, and their Chinese counterparts, has met twice. The Economic and Trade Dialogue, led on the U.S. side by Secretary of Commerce Wilbur Ross and Treasury Secretary Steve Mnuchin, has also met twice. The Law Enforcement and Cyber Security Dialogue and the People-to-People Dialogue have not yet met.

This approach to China, as well as the approach to Russia described below, is directly opposite to the geopolitical expressions of President Obama, Hillary Clinton, the neo-cons regardless of party affiliation, and the Democratic Party Congressional leadership today. The hideously evil view of that latter crew is that nuclear war must be at least risked, if not waged, to destroy any power that has achieved a status that might threaten the world domination of Britain and its allies, not because of anything they have done or threatened to do, but simply because of their ability to threaten the empire. This, incidentally, explains why the Cold War that many people naively believe was a conflict between communism and capitalism, is being revived almost thirty years after the collapse of European communism. The public founder of the Cold War, Winston Churchill, and his allies, have made it clear repeatedly, that their cause was neither capitalism nor freedom, but the destruction of threats to the existence of the empire.

Russia

Next Tillerson turned to the relationship with Russia. He recalled that on his first trip to Moscow to meet with President Vladimir Putin, Putin had said “the relationship was at a historic low since the end of the Cold War and it could get worse.” Tillerson then asked, “Is it getting worse, or can we maintain some level of stability in that relationship, and continue to find ways to address areas of mutual interest and ways in which we can deal with our differences without those becoming open conflicts as well?”

Tillerson discussed the working relationship in the war against ISIS in Syria, saying both powers are committed to the defeat of ISIS and the other terrorist organizations, and both are committed to a unified Syria in which the Syrian people arrange a new constitution, in which the threat of post-ISIS civil war is averted, and they conduct free and fair elections to choose their leadership. The United States and Russia disagree on the future of the elected President, Bashar al-Assad. He

noted that Russia has aligned itself with Assad, but that the United States finds him unacceptable. In fact, President Putin and his government have said that they are now cooperating with the elected president, but that the future leadership of Syria is up to the Syrian people. Despite these differences, a zone of “deconfliction” has been achieved and is holding steady, and the United States and Russia are collaborating in expanding this to other regions of Syria. As for the differences with Russia, Tillerson said, “The sequencing of all that we’re open to, as long as that is what is achieved at the end.”

Thus, although Tillerson has explained U.S. differences with Russia, the Administration is not letting these hold up the peace process. He does not mention the potential conflict between the goal of eventually ousting Assad, and that of permitting the Syrians to choose their own government. He also does not mention the fact, often raised by the governments of Syria and Russia, that Russia is legitimately providing military aid to the internationally recognized government of Syria, whereas the United States, while cooperating to some extent with Russia and the Assad government, is not a legitimate guest of Syria. Despite the U.S. misgivings about Assad, President Trump has withdrawn support for militias that have been fighting against his government. Clearly, the Trump Administration is leaving room for further reconciliation with Russia in this area.

The other area of tension with Russia that Tillerson mentioned is Ukraine. He insisted that the Minsk accords must be implemented, but Russia agrees with this. They do disagree on the interpretation of Minsk. He pointed to the appointment of special representative Kurt Volker, which Russia has welcomed, to move the reconciliation process further.

The Middle East and ISIS

Tillerson then outlined the progress being made against ISIS in Iraq, stating that approximately two million Iraqis have been able to return home. He emphasized that the U.S. role in this is to secure areas in cooperation with local law enforcement, to help local leaders return to their communities, and restore basic needs like power, water, and sewage. “That’s where we stop,” he said, “We’re not there to rebuild their communities. That’s for them to do and that’s for the international community.”

He referenced the “grand coalition” of 68 countries



U.S. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson (right), with U.S. Secretary of Homeland Security John Kelly, at a press conference in Mexico City, Feb. 23, 2017.

Xinhua

the United States has worked with, and stated that the intention is to recognize ISIS as a global threat that has now surfaced in the Philippines and threatens Southeast Asia. He also referred to the need to battle terrorism in cyberspace, a recruiting arena for ISIS.

Tillerson mentioned the successful agreement with Iran to curtail its nuclear weapons program, but asserted that it is conducting other destabilizing activities and is attempting to expand into Yemen, Iraq, Syria, and Afghanistan. This approach is one that Russia openly disagrees with. Tillerson also failed to address the dire humanitarian disaster, including a massive cholera epidemic and widespread famine, in Yemen, caused by Saudi Arabia's U.S.-backed war against its tiny neighbor. Nonetheless, the Administration has not cut off contact with the concerned parties.

Western Hemisphere

Tillerson reported on his trip with then Secretary of Homeland Security John Kelly, to establish cooperation with Mexico. They established a "framework" to attack the drug cartels and other criminal organizations. A large part of U.S. responsibility in this, he said, is that "we are the customer," and he said that the Department of Health and Human Services will be working on attacking that problem at home. He reported a 70% to 80% reduction in illegal border crossings.

Other concerns expressed in this hemisphere include working on security and prosperity for Central

America, and the reduction of violence and return to democracy in Venezuela.

The State Department

Secretary Tillerson has come under attack in the media and by some foreign policy experts, including unnamed State Department officials, for operating independently of the foreign policy professionals. He addressed this throughout his talk by commending by name the career diplomats who made positive contributions to every initiative he discussed. In addressing the organizational problem directly, he pointed out that only one of the six under-secretary positions in the department has been filled. In the State Department, under

secretaries rank just below the deputy secretary, and they direct the major branches of the Department, so this is a critical shortcoming. He also reported that many of the assistant secretary positions that rank just below the under secretaries, are filled with "acting" officers. Nonetheless, Tillerson said, the professional foreign service officers have made it possible for the department to accomplish what it has in his first six months in office. He added that he meets with his staff on the Under Secretary and Assistant Secretary level several times a week, and is in touch with staff at all levels, through lunches and other means. In responding to a question on this, he said that he expected, given the radical change in administration, that some would have difficulty in making the transition, but that most had committed themselves. For those who objected to a particular responsibility, he offered them the option of switching to something they would do willingly, rather than having people in place who objected to their assignments.

Tillerson reported on his handling of a redesign of the State Department. Based on his experience in private business management, he is leading an "employee-led effort" that began with a survey soliciting input from all employees.

The Administration

The first question asked of Tillerson involved the misunderstandings created by President Trump's tweets



President Trump's first cabinet meeting. He is flanked by Secretary of State Tillerson (left) and Secretary of Defense James Mattis (right).

and the appointment of John Kelly as White House Chief of staff. Rather than choosing to refer this question, as “professional” Secretaries of State and their spokespeople would do, to the White House, Tillerson answered directly. He said that based on his collaboration with Kelly on the issues in Mexico, he thinks he will do a fine job, and that President Trump would not have appointed him if he did not want real change at the White House. He frankly explained his attitude to the President's tweets as well, saying, “It's part of the environment in which we work. We'll adapt to it. There's a lot of unexpected things that happen to us in the world of diplomacy and we know how to adapt to that, so I don't view it as an obstacle, a hindrance, or as an assistance. Whatever the President chooses to express, he expresses, and then that's information to everybody, us included.”

The last question to him involved Secretary Tillerson's relationship to the President. His answer was unusually frank for an on-the-record press conference. He said his relationship with Trump is good. “The President has repeatedly expressed his confidence in me; I talk to him just about every day. I see him several times a week. He calls me late at night on the weekends when something comes into his head and he wants to talk. He may call me at any moment at any time, but it is a very open relationship, and it's one in which I feel quite comfortable telling him my views. And he and I have differences of views on things like JCPOA [the nuclear treaty with Iran] and how we should use it. I think if we're not having those differences, I'm not sure I'm serving him. The relationship between the President

and myself is good. That's how I view it anyway.”

The Future Is Ours To Win or Lose

Tillerson's remarks make it clear that this administration has acted with a higher level of wisdom and responsibility than any in recent memory. It also, as Trump's signing statements demonstrate, has not lost the will or the ability to surprise its enemies with effective countermeasures. They have expressed laudable goals including improving our productive capabilities, making affordable health

care available, and putting Americans back to work. The expressed intention to collaborate with the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative is also a tremendous improvement over the previous administration's animosity against Chinese growth. Despite these intentions, and President Trump's references to the American System of economics, and to the restoration of Franklin Roosevelt's Glass-Steagall Act, the Administration has not demonstrated a clear understanding that the whole institution of money as it has been used up until now has to be scrapped, and replaced with a system in which the requirements of the future dictate what economic developments take place and are allocated financial resources accordingly.

In the area of foreign policy *per se*, the administration has rejected the poison of geopolitics as the basis for policy. Unfortunately, as in the approach to South Korea, Iran, Russia, and China, it has not totally put the deadly legacy of Obama Administration policies behind us.

The Trump Administration has done far more than we had a right to hope for, because of our own neglect of our nation's policies. Now it is up to every American to recognize that it is their own ability to rise above the geopolitical lunacies perpetrated by the failed Wall Street “establishment”—and get under the skin of their compatriots to build a tidal wave for the New Silk Road policies designed by Lyndon and Helga LaRouche and adopted by China, Russia, and other governments representing the majority of the world's population—that will carry us past the danger of economic collapse or nuclear conflict to a future in which the fight for creative development is our only conflict.