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**NEXT KCDW MEETING JAN 25TH (WEDNESDAY):** Yacht Club Broiler – No host lunch – 11:30 am; Meeting – 12:30 pm. Speaker TBA; NO RSVP required.

*The following article is written by Carol J. Williams, a new KCDW member, who, in her life before retirement, worked for 30 years as a foreign correspondent for both the Associated Press and the Los Angeles Times. She lived abroad for nearly 20 years, including eight years in Russia, and reported from more than 80 countries. She has won several awards, and was a finalist for a 1993 Pulitzer Prize for International Reporting. We are very fortunate that she agreed to ponder the foreign policy implications of the new administration for us here.*

## **TRUMP'S HELTER-SKELTER FOREIGN POLICY**

*By Carol J. Williams*

President-elect Donald Trump hasn't yet occupied the Oval Office but he has already shaken fundamental pillars of U.S. foreign policy.

His congratulatory phone call from Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-wen broke with Washington's 37-year observation of diplomatic recognition of "One China," that being the communist-ruled People's Republic. The U.S. breach of protocol so angered mainland China that its state-run media talked of taking back Taiwan by force, the Beijing government formally protested to the White House and its navy seized a U.S. underwater drone in the South China Sea.

Three days before Christmas, Trump called for abandoning another decades-old tenet of international security policy in declaring – via Twitter – that the United States should “greatly strengthen and expand” its nuclear arsenal. That departure from a nonproliferation posture alarmed arms control experts across the political spectrum. When asked about the risk of reigniting a nuclear weapons buildup, Trump shrugged it off. “Let it be an arms race,” he told an MSNBC interviewer.

Trump’s next foray into foreign affairs was a brazen attempt to wield presidential powers before his inauguration. He called on President Obama to reject a U.N. vote to censure Israel for building settlements in territory destined for a Palestinian state. Trump’s tweeted directive failed to compel Obama to veto the world body’s criticism of Israel. But the intrusion signaled his intent to invoke a more pro-Israel policy in the Middle East that will further complicate relations with the Muslim and Arab worlds. And his choice of South Carolina Gov. Nikki Haley as the next U.S. ambassador to the U.N., a moderate Republican but one with no foreign policy experience, has done little to inspire confidence in the next administration’s grasp of the complexities besetting U.S. relations with much of the world.

The incoming president has said little about how he plans to implement his most incendiary campaign promises: to build a wall along the Mexican border, to deport 11 million undocumented residents already in the country and to bar entry to the United States for Muslims from countries afflicted by terrorism. But his national security, diplomatic and military appointments reflect his isolationist “America First” ideology that is likely to frustrate trade, divide U.S.-born children from deported immigrant parents and complicate U.S. bilateral

relations with countries that have been on good terms with ours for many years.

During the campaign, Trump often departed from longstanding and bipartisan policy on Russia, suggesting that Moscow's seizure of the Crimea region from Ukraine and the fomenting of rebellion in the former Soviet state were not issues affecting U.S. interests. Likewise, he had no objection to Russian airstrikes that helped Syrian President Bashar Assad drive out rebels and civilians from his country's largest city, Aleppo, as the Kremlin's deadly intervention was also aimed at ousting Islamic State militants from their Syrian strongholds.

Trump has threatened to destroy the Islamic State, also known as ISIS, in his first months as president. But it remains to be seen how he will square that massive undertaking with his criticism of U.S. intervention in faraway conflicts like those in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Potentially the most destabilizing of Trump's campaign trail vows is his rejection of the Iran nuclear deal negotiated by six major powers that restricts Tehran's atomic development in exchange for international sanctions relief. Revoking the U.S. commitment to the nuclear agreement would anger Iran and lead to its resuming pursuit of a nuclear bomb. A unilateral U.S. scuttling of the hard-won agreement would also deprive the five other signatories to the deal -- Russia, China, Britain, France and Germany -- of its security and trade dividends, damaging U.S. relations with the world's most powerful states.

Trump's nominee to head the Central Intelligence Agency, Rep.

Mike Pompeo (R-Kansas), tweeted shortly after his announced appointment: “I look forward to rolling back this disastrous deal with the world’s largest state sponsor of terrorism.”

Retired Marine Gen. James N. Mattis, Trump’s choice for Defense Secretary, is also a harsh critic of Iran. In an April speech at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, Mattis described Iran as “the single most enduring threat to stability and peace in the Middle East.” But he has also conceded that scrapping the accord isn’t a viable option without the other signatories on board.

Trump spoke belligerently during the campaign about North Korea and the erratic regime of leader Kim Jong-un. Amid the tense exchanges with Beijing after the Taiwan diplomatic blunder, Trump called on China to rein in Pyongyang’s progress in developing nuclear weapons. After Kim boasted in a New Year’s speech that his country was nearing completion of a nuclear-armed missile capable of reaching the United States, Trump turned to Twitter to proclaim “It won’t happen!” Then he sent a second tweet blasting Beijing: “China has been taking out massive amounts of money & wealth from the U.S. in totally one-sided trade, but won’t help with North Korea. Nice!”

His bursts of criticism at China exude frustration and have kindled fears that Trump might take his own action to neutralize North Korea once he is president. Trump has refused to pledge a commitment to a “no first use” policy on nuclear weapons, saying he wants to keep all options on the table. Some of his senior military advisors could be counted on to dissuade him from a dangerous and destabilizing pre-emptive strike. North Korea is a diplomatic and security headache for all its neighbors

but China and Russia would be antagonized by any U.S. intervention in their Asian Pacific neighborhood, raising the prospect of escalating conflict across the nuclear-armed region.

Another major concern among foreign policy experts is the internal policy contradictions among his incoming government team. Competing voices within Cabinet departments create uncertainty over which of the rival ideologies will be persuasive with a new president with no foreign policy experience of his own and an aversion to reading, briefings or taking advice.

Trump's campaign trail musings on how nice it would be to have better relations with Moscow have been enhanced by his nomination of Exxon Mobile CEO Rex Tillerson as the next Secretary of State. For more than a decade, Tillerson has had dealings with Russian oil operations worth billions and counts President Vladimir Putin as a reliable friend and partner. The Texas oil man may face confirmation hurdles because of his potential conflicts of interest with Russia and other states with flawed human rights records. But if he is confirmed as America's top diplomat, he would confront a State Department hierarchy vastly more critical of Putin's Russia and a Congress committed to keeping sanctions in place to curb Kremlin aggression.

Nevertheless, Trump has hinted at major changes in U.S. defense and security policy that Putin might interpret as a U.S. green light for further incursions into sovereign neighbors' territory. The Baltic states of Estonia and Latvia have large Russian minorities that the Kremlin leader has vowed to defend against what he sees as discrimination by their nationalist leaders. Russian seizure of territory in other former Soviet states -- Georgia in 2008, Ukraine in 2014 -- has rattled nerves

throughout the Baltic region, and those fears have intensified with Trump's observation during the campaign that U.S. defense of the Baltic NATO members might depend on whether they have been paying their fair share for the collective defense pact.

U.S. failure to defend a NATO member state under attack would fracture the alliance that has kept the peace in Europe since its founding in 1949. Some senior U.S. foreign policy officials have been scrambling to reassure the Baltic states that Washington is a reliable ally and will respond to an attack on any one of NATO's 28 member nations with all necessary firepower and resolve. Republican Sens. John McCain and Lindsey Graham visited the Baltic states in the last days of December to reiterate the U.S. government's commitment to NATO, despite Trump's unsettling words. But the senators were not dispatched by Trump nor briefed on his current attitude toward the alliance. Trump couldn't break with the alliance without the backing of Congress but as commander-in-chief he could choose not to send U.S. forces to repel a Russian intrusion if one were to occur.

Trump's nomination of Tillerson for Secretary of State could undermine Western unity on how best to contain Russia. Tillerson has criticized the sanctions imposed by the U.S. and European Union to punish Russia for its seizure of Ukrainian territory. The punishment cost Exxon billions as it blocked a joint venture with Russia's Rosneft to exploit Arctic region resources. Tillerson will likely be required to divest himself of Exxon shares worth about \$240 million but concerns remain about his track record of ignoring human rights abuses by foreign partners.

Putin has said little about the incoming U.S. administration beyond congratulating Trump on his surprising victory. Russian

Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov has praised Tillerson as a “pragmatic” choice for Secretary of State. Russian political analysts have also expressed pleasure at the impending change of the guard in Washington.

Sergei Karaganov, dean of the World Economy and Politics Department of Moscow’s School of Economics, said in a recent interview with Russia Beyond the Headlines, an independent and respected online magazine, that “Tillerson and all of Trump's foreign policy and security appointees are a) different from the previous politicians and b) not ideologized like the previous ones.”

Russian expectations of improved relations and sanctions relief from a President Trump are likely to lead to tremendous disappointment, some veteran foreign policy experts warn.

“There’s a lot of wishful thinking going on in Moscow,” Alexander Vershbow, a former U.S. ambassador to Russia and top NATO official, told journalists at a post-election discussion at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars. Noting that Kremlin officials take no responsibility for the East-West tensions that followed their Crimea land grab, he warned that the leadership is “setting the public up for real disappointment.”

What Trump expects of Russia in return for improved ties is unclear. And his persistence in misinterpreting what Putin said about him early in the presidential race is troubling as it suggests he tunes out facts in preference of flattery.



“He called me brilliant, and that was nice,” Trump has repeatedly told interviewers, even after Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov publicly corrected the Trump campaign’s translation of Putin’s remark. The Russian leader observed in late 2015 that Trump was the frontrunner in the then-crowded race for the Republican nomination. Putin described Trump as a “yarky chelovek,” which the TASS news agency translated as “a flamboyant fellow.” The Russian adjective “yarky” can also be interpreted as “bright,” but in the visual sense, like a bright light or bright color. It has no application to intellect -- except in Trump’s mind.

Much remains a mystery as to Trump’s priorities in dealing with the rest of the world, not least because his few policy pronouncements have come via Twitter. With its 140-character limit, the writer is compelled to oversimplify complex matters or to zero in on one aspect of an issue at the expense of a comprehensive analysis. Trump’s frequent use of exclamation marks in his tweets also detracts from the authority of his message.

Both backers and critics of Trump appear to hope he will adopt a more traditional and collaborative approach to crafting U.S. foreign policy once in office and that he will weigh the advice of his more knowledgeable government and military leaders. But given Trump’s claim to know more about ISIS than the U.S. generals and to reject the nation’s top intelligence officials’ conclusion that Russia hacked the U.S. election suggests he will continue to give preference to his own counsel.

*Carol J. Williams will be giving a speech on **Why the US and Russia Find Themselves in a New Cold War** for the*



*En!ghten Kitsap Community Forum - January 20th, 6:00 to 8:30 pm at St. Paul's Episcopal Church; 700 Callahan Dr., Bremerton. For more information about this event and this forum go to <http://www.enlightenkitsap.org/> [1].*

## **OTHER UPCOMING DEMOCRATIC MEETINGS AND EVENTS:** (*\*GM designates a general membership meeting*)

**Kitsap County Democratic Central Committee:** Re-Org Mtg Jan 14th (Saturday); 10 am; Eagles Nest; Only current Resident PCO's can vote.

GM\* Jan 30th (Monday); 6:30 pm Desserts; 7 pm meeting; Eagles Nest

**23rd Legislative District Democrats:** GM\* Jan 19th (Thursday); 6:30 pm Social; 7 pm meeting; Poulsbo City Hall

**26th Legislative District Democrats:** GM\* Feb 5th (Thursday); 7-9 pm; Kitsap Rm, Givens Ctr. 1026 Sidney Rd, Pt Orchard

**35th Legislative District Democrats:** GM\* TBA - Go to <http://35thdemocrats.org/> [2] for more information

## **KITSAP COUNTY DEMOCRATIC WOMEN OFFICERS:**

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### **Support**

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*"...Trump is not a national leader; he is a national show. ...it could be that governing Trump will be a White House holograph. When it comes to the substance of actual governance, it could be that President Trump is the man who isn't there. The crucial question of the Trump administration could be: Who will fill the void left by a leader who is all façade?" – David Brooks, Syndicated columnist, Seattle Times January 4, 2017.*

## Newsletter:

- [KCDW Newsletter](#) [8]

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