



## What Do Trump's Personnel Picks Reveal About Next Admin?

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**Glenn Greenwald (GG):** So there have been a lot of questions and a lot of confusion now that Donald Trump has won about what the second Trump administration is going to look like. Will it be similar to the first Trump administration that was beset by all sorts of factional infighting, by people who were able to burrow their way into the Trump administration, even though they were clearly there to sabotage and undermine what Donald Trump said his agenda was? They were really impeded by all sorts of media scandals that they had to constantly attend to. And as a result, I think there was a lot of ideological incoherence in Donald Trump's administration, both in terms of economic policy and foreign policy. Remember, for example, that the 2016 campaign of Donald Trump was very oriented toward economic populism. Steve Bannon's plan was: let's get into office, raise taxes on the rich, then do a bipartisan infrastructure bill to create jobs and then build the wall. And instead, the first thing Donald Trump did was not anything remotely populist, but anti-populist, which was to cut taxes on very large corporations. So there was always this kind of tension between things that Trump clearly believed and the things that the Trump administration did. And a lot of the explanation was, well, look, there's just certain – you need time to understand how Washington works. And if you don't have that, you'll get thwarted and defeated and subverted by a lot of the permanent power factions in Washington, the administrative state, the US security state. And so a lot of Donald Trump's promises about what the second administration would be was that it would not be driven by neoconservatives or interventionists or warmongers of the kind that Donald Trump has long railed against. And there was a lot of concern over the last several weeks that people like Mike Pompeo and Nikki Haley, who embody that ideology, would be part of his administration. And in response to those concerns, Trump announced and obviously, in general, you don't announce who won't be part of your administration. But Trump decided to try and signal to his base that he would not be going in that direction again. And he said the following, quote, "I will not be inviting former Ambassador Nikki Haley or former Secretary of State Mike Pompeo to join the Trump administration, which is currently in formation. I very much enjoyed and appreciated working

with them previously and would like to thank them for their service to our country. Make America Great Again!" Now, that came after Ben Shapiro went on The Free Press a couple of weeks ago and basically said that he was certain that Mike Pompeo was going to be part of the Trump administration. That gave Ben Shapiro a lot of comfort because Mike Pompeo had a similar foreign policy to Ben Shapiro when it comes to wars, interventions and especially Israel. Here's what Ben Shapiro said.

**The Free Press:** From a policy perspective, do you think a Harris administration would be better on Israel than a Trump administration?

**Sam Harris (SH):** I do, because it would be staffed by sane people. And what we have – again, do you want Mr. Pillow Guy in the conversation with Mike Flynn? And who, Candace Owens? Who's going to be in there? Jack Posobiec? I mean...

**Ben Shapiro (BS):** No, I mean, on his Israel policy, Mike Pompeo and David Friedman are the most likely people to be in the administration and on Kamala Harris's side it's most likely to be Philip Gordon.

**SH:** He is surrounded by grifters and maniacs.

**BS:** Sam, I know. I know precisely the people talking to him. So I'm not speculating about that.

**GG:** All right. So Ben Shapiro strongly suggested that Mike Pompeo was going to be part of the administration. I think Trump, for whatever reasons, said, to pre-empt this concern: okay, they're not going to be part of my administration. Now, that was taken as a fairly positive sign by a lot of people concerned about the infiltration of warmongers and neoconservatives into the Trump administration, that he was going to be making an effort to keep such people out. And in response to that, Dave Smith, who I think has become one of the most incisive political commentators, said the following, quote: "The 'stop Pompeo' movement is great, but it's not enough. Right now, we need maximum pressure to keep all neocons and war hawks out of the Trump administration. They have had their time at the table and brought nothing but disaster to the world and to this country." And above that, Donald Trump Jr., who by all accounts and my information as well, is exercising more influence than he previously ever has. And I think he's one of the people in Trump's most inner circle most opposed to these kinds of neocons into these kinds of war hawks. In response to Dave Smith saying stopping Pompeo was not enough, we have to stop all people like that from getting into Trump's administration, Donald Trump said: I'm agreeing. Agreed, 100%, 100%, 100%, I'm honored. Basically saying, look, I agree with you and these are not going to be the kind of people who are going to be in administration now.

In response to Trump's announcement that neither Mike Pompeo nor Nikki Haley would be in his administration, The Wall Street Journal op-ed page, which is very aligned with the Bush-Cheney Republican establishments foreign policy had a conniption, a sort of fit. And

they editorialized as follows on November 10th: Quote, *Behind Trump's Mike Pompeo Ban*. "Don Jr. and his allies veto Nikki Haley and the former Secretary of State for the cabinet. They don't want competition for J.D. Vance in 2028." Quote, "The Pompeo ban makes more sense in light of the changing hierarchy behind the scenes in Mr. Trump's world. Mr. Trump's son Don Jr. is wielding greater influence, as is the media provocateur Tucker Carlson and their coterie. They lobbied hard to make J.D. Vance Mr. Trump's running mate, and they're already pulling strings to make him heir apparent. They'd like to block anyone who might challenge Mr. Vance from gaining stature by holding a cabinet position in the second Trump term." That's just speculative gossip. Here's the key. Quote: "There is also a foreign policy calculation at work. Mr. Pompeo and Ms. Haley believed in robust US leadership in the world, including support for Ukraine, NATO and alliances in the Pacific. The Don Jr. crowd and Mr. Vance want to pull back from some of those commitments. One online MAGA acolyte" – which is Dave Matthews, whose name they didn't want to use – "tweeted Sunday" – what we just showed you – "'the Stop Pompeo movement is great, but right now it's not enough. We need maximum pressure to keep all the neocons and war hawks out of the Trump administration.' Don Jr. retweeted his assent: 'Agree 100%. I'm on it.' We told you before the election that Don Jr. was emerging as an inside power player, but we wonder if his father likes this boasting that the kid is telling Dad what to do." Obviously, trying to provoke Trump to not listen to Don Jr. anymore when he says "keep neocons out". "It isn't clear where the president-elect will come out on all of this. And the cabinet choices he does make will tell us more. But the ban on Mr. Pompeo, who would have made a fine Defence secretary and Arkansas defense hawk Tom Cotton's declaration that he wants to remain in the Senate aren't favorable signs for Trump foreign policy." In other words, they are favorable signs for Trump foreign policy. They signal that Donald Trump is trying to avoid the infiltration of neocons and warmongers in his cabinet.

That's what it seemed like as of December [Editor's note: November] 10th, when he announced the pre-emptive banning of Nikki Haley and Mike Pompeo. What then happened, though, was that Trump began announcing more appointees to his national security team. And in many ways it went in the exact opposite direction. It started including people whose foreign policy views are basically indistinguishable from Mike Pompeo's and Nikki Haley's. In fact, the position that Nikki Haley occupied in the first Trump term, which was US ambassador to the UN, is now going to be filled by Congresswoman Elise Stefanik. As the New York Times reported yesterday, Trump offers Elise Stefanik a role as UN ambassador. Quote, "Ms. Stefanik, who represents an upstate New York district in the House and is a member of the Republican leadership in the chamber, has been a vocal supporter of Mr. Trump. She has been an outspoken supporter of Israel and had a high-profile role in the congressional hearings that led to the resignation of several university presidents over their handling of campus unrest following the terror attack by Hamas on Israel and the subsequent war in Gaza. In a statement, Mr. Trump called her a, quote, 'strong, tough and smart America First fighter'." And she's a vocal supporter of the US war in Ukraine. She tried to, right before the election, kind of give a signal that she was trying to wield in, rein in some of the unlimited spending. But she has a worldview that is very aligned with Nikki Haley and Mike Pompeo. So it's good that Mike Pompeo and Nikki Haley are banned. But the fact that Elise

Stefanik, who's probably, well, definitely as much of a supporter of Israel's as Nikki Haley and who has become a vocal supporter of all of these foreign policy views in general, is going to now be taking Nikki Haley's place. So you can question how significant was the ban on Nikki Haley?

Right before we went on air, just a few minutes before we did, Trump announced his choice for National Security Advisor, which is obviously an important position. That is a person who advises Donald Trump on national security matters as his top national security adviser in the White House. And for that position, he chose Congressman Mike Waltz of Florida, who was a former Green Beret, who was deployed in Iraq. And he has a very hawkish and hardline view on things like supporting the US war in Ukraine. In fact, his criticism has been that Joe Biden and Kamala Harris hadn't done enough. He's also now saying things like we have to rein in the blank check. But he actually, Mike Waltz, worked with Liz Cheney to oppose Trump's plan to withdraw from Afghanistan, saying that, "look, I'm sorry. I know you want to leave Afghanistan" – was his view – "but you have to accept this is an intergenerational war. We're there to fight terrorism and we have to stay until we win, even if it means we stay several more decades." He's also very hawkish on China. He is a skeptic of NATO. He believes that NATO countries should be forced to spend a lot more money on their defense because it's unfair to the United States, something that Donald Trump vehemently believes. He's been a long time Trump supporter. So Mike Waltz, who is definitely not an anti-interventionist, to put it mildly, is the person who will be National Security Advisor.

And then, after we went on the air, Trump announced his choice for Secretary of State. And that person will be Senator Marco Rubio, the Republican of Florida. Now, as you might remember, Marco Rubio, in 2016, was one of the people who ran against Donald Trump along with Jeb Bush. In fact, once Jeb Bush was dispatched, Marco Rubio became the choice of the Republican establishment, and Donald Trump frequently criticized him at the time, validly so, for being one of those neocons, for being one of those warhawks. Marco Rubio is a fanatical supporter, for example, of US funding of the war in Ukraine. He's been an ardent supporter of every American intervention. He will do anything to finance and arm Israel and its war. So these last three choices are. Conflicting with the first two with that ban on Nikki Haley and Mike Pompeo. At the same time, J.D. Vance, who was his vice president choice, was campaigned for by people like Donald Trump Jr and Tucker Carlson, was a choice that signaled a more populous bent. I can't – you could find statements from J.D. Vance that are supportive of Republican foreign policy, but you can find a lot of ones that are very skeptical of it as well. And that's why neocons like The Wall Street Journal page were very angry at the choice of J.D. Vance instead of Marco Rubio for vice president. So I think what you have here is something that seems quite similar to me to be what shaped and drove Trump's first term as president. I don't think Trump likes to give anyone too much power to make any faction feel like they have him under their thumb. I think he enjoys putting different factions in power, giving some people some things, giving other people other things. And on some level, we can sit here and try and decipher every signal from every one of these appointees about the direction in which Trump is going. But I think what Trump has proven is that he often operates by instinct. He's not very reliable ideologically. You don't really know what

Trump's going to do. So he has been very clear that he wants the war in Ukraine to be over. The only way the war in Ukraine can be over is by handing the parts of Ukraine that Russia occupies over to Russia. And there are critical people that he's now appointed in top level national security positions, including at least Vaneck and Mike Waltz and Marco Rubio, the last three, who would be vehement opponents of doing that.

The same is true for trying to end the war in Gaza or the war in Lebanon. These are a lot of people who have beaten their chest and the war drums about war in Iran. So if you're looking for a series of uniformed anti-interventionist or anti-neocons who Trump is going to select as his key national security positions, you're already going to be disappointed. Marco Rubio, Michael Waltz, Elise Stefanik do not give any comfort at all in terms of avoiding the repetition of the problems of the first administration. Donald Trump Jr's vow that he was trying to keep people like that out, I'm sure he tried, but clearly Mark Rubio as Secretary of State is something that's going to make every single neocon and standard Republican warmonger very happy and very comfortable with, as well as these others. We already know that Miriam Adelson has immense power in the Trump administration, is a fanatical Israel supporter, Trump himself said that she and her husband, Sheldon Adelson, were probably the most frequent visitors to the White House in his first term, and he gave them everything on Israel, including more than what they asked for. She now has given them \$100 million for his campaign and obviously expects a lot in return from that. So I'm not going to be premature and sit here and describe a Trump administration that has yet to begin. And I think one of the things that makes people in establishment institutions so uncomfortable with Trump is that he is quite unpredictable. Sometimes he will affirm and follow and align with standard D.C. foreign policy consensus, and other times he'll just be ready to blow it up. But if you're looking for signals in these early appointments and these early gestures, I don't think you can find anything that makes it look likely like Donald Trump is going to wage war against American neoconservatives or warmongers in Washington. But a lot of times the people Donald Trump appoints are not people who end up expressing the direction in which he will actually go. There will be a lot of competition, a lot of factional conflict over who will influence and drive Donald Trump. You can find people like Tucker Carlson heaping scorn on many of the people that he just named. There's no question Tucker Carlson is influential in that world. Same with Donald Trump Jr. But obviously there's a lot of people who are important to Trump and who are close to Trump, who he also listens to, who have very different views.

So I think it's premature to say the Trump administration is going to be this or that. Especially given the question mark that Donald Trump always is. And I think that's always been the appeal of Donald Trump. I recently heard my former Intercept colleague, Jeremy Scahill, no fan of Donald Trump, describe Trump as a, quote, "circuit breaker". I think he was quoting Seymour Hersh, saying that Trump is the only person who can be a circuit breaker on how the D.C. bipartisan foreign policy class operates, just through his unpredictability, through his obvious dissent from a lot of foreign policy dogma and his instincts to avoid war. But he's certainly constructing his administration with people who are in key positions, top jobs, who are ardent supporters of the foreign policy that both the Democratic and Republican

establishments like a lot and are very comfortable with, culminating in the appointment of Marco Rubio as his Secretary of State. So we will obviously continue to report on this. It's one of the big concerns about what the second Trump administration would be. I think the problem is there were no question marks about what the Harris administration would be. We knew exactly what it would be. She would be just an empty vessel and servant for establishment dogma. And if that's what Trump ends up being when it comes to foreign policy, nothing gained, nothing lost. But I think the potential is a lot higher for Trump to buckle from that and deviate from it. But there's nothing in these initial choices that suggest that that's what he's planning on doing.

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