

### Talking Points

The US State Department is widely regarded as in total disarray. The State Department budget was cut 30%, over 2300 staff have been lost and there are reports of general dissatisfaction among those who remain. To this point, there has been no clear strategy regarding what a newly revamped State Department should look like or even achieve. Meanwhile, cooperation between the State Department and other parts of the US government (Defense, Justice, Commerce, Treasury, White House) seem as poorly orchestrated as its interaction with other countries and their ambassadors. Reports indicate most ambassadors and foreign heads of state have given up even attempting to communicate with our State Department because there is no one to talk with who can communicate their concerns. There are major problems brewing throughout the world (North Korea, Afghanistan, Russian expansionism, Middle East turmoil, South African instability under Zuma, Turkish repression under Erdogan, China and the South China Sea, climate change, human trafficking and human rights concerns). Rex Tillerson appears to be eliminating fire departments, firemen and fire support as the city burns. His efforts to calm the situation between Saudi Arabia and Qatar was undone by a Trump tweet about Qatar being a State sponsor of terrorism. His efforts to ease tension in Korea was undone by a Trump tweet about how the US has the most advanced nuclear arsenal ever. Jared Kushner (not Tillerson) was given point authority to solve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. All this raises serious concerns in our minds about the US State Department as an effective voice within the present US administration, its ability to function in future administrations (due to lost talent) and what McConnell plans to do to address these and other major diplomatic problems that have arisen due to this administration.

#### QUESTIONS:

1. Our foreign policy is in free fall, and we are besieged and threatened from several quarters. Secretary of State Tillerson has been behind the curve on every foreign policy turn of the last six months, and most key deputies have not been replaced." ***What does Senator McConnell plan to do to reverse the collapse of the State Department since this administration began by cutting its budget 30 per cent and firing over 2300 middle and top level officials who have not been replaced?***
2. Trump has proven himself to be a loose cannon who tweets whatever comes to mind, and that is disorienting in a world in which other world leaders attempt to dissect the meaning of his tweets to decide their actions or reactions to often radical changes in US policies and positions. This is particularly disconcerting with regard to North Korea. ***What does McConnell plan to do to prevent Trump from initiating a major conflict with North Korea by his "tweet tensions" in place of actual diplomacy?***
3. Trump has indicated he wants to end the Iran nuclear deal, even creating a group to justify this action although there is no evidence Iran has not been complying with the nuclear agreement. This has escalated Iran's threat to start up its nuclear program again. ***Does McConnell have any plan(s) to avoid Trump's effort to unravel years of diplomatic work that could easily put us right back at square one with Iran and its nuclear program?***
4. Diplomacy represents a critical component of US power. It's projection of "soft power" as a counter to "hard power" by the Dept. of Defense, serves as a moderating aspect of overall US foreign policy. Thus, major reductions in State Department preparedness creates an imbalance in how US addresses world issues and deals with foreign powers. Moreover, the cost of diplomacy is far, far less than the cost of military intervention. ***What efforts is McConnell taking to bring some balance back to how the US employs its soft power as effectively as its hard power to***

***deal with international issues and reverse the present dismantling of our Department of State?"***

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