

Donald Trump's foreign policy cabinet nominees, poised to advance his agenda

**Written in the style of the Economist Intelligence Unit's Events Insights*

What's happened?

Following his election victory, President-elect Donald Trump began the process of forming his cabinet. The common denominator between foreign policy selections is an alignment with Trump on policy issues, rather than relevant credentials. As a result, many of Trump's cabinet choices have raised concern, both domestically and internationally.

Why does it matter?

The foreign policy cabinet nominations would result in a unified foreign policy direction and would enhance Trump's power. Trump has chosen top-level allies that largely concur with him on key areas of foreign policy, such as the conflict in the Middle East. At the same time, Trump seeks to reconcile different Republican factions in his selections of professional politicians. For example, Marco Rubio (Secretary of State nominee) represents the interventionist wing that is in line with a traditional hawkish Republican view. In contrast, Tulsi Gabbard (Director of National Intelligence nominee) represents the anti-interventionist wing, deviating from traditional Republicanism. The inclusion of distinct factions broadens Trump's appeal and influence without undermining his overarching "America First" priority.

In terms of international relations, the US is likely to bolster its support for Israel, while reducing its commitment to Ukraine. Trump's foreign policy choices are of a pro-Israel posture. Rubio for instance, has expressed opposition to a ceasefire in Gaza and believes that Israel should "destroy every element of Hamas". In the case of Ukraine however, foreign policy nominees are broadly supportive of a US withdrawal. For example, Gabbard has defended Russian aggression in Ukraine and has been a vocal critic of US entanglement in the conflict. Additionally, Pete Hegseth (Secretary of Defence nominee) has stressed the need to prioritise resources to address domestic US issues, as opposed to maintaining financial and military aid to Ukraine.

International economy dynamics will shift, given the support for protectionism by Trump's foreign policy nominees. A notable manifestation of protectionist US economic policy involves action against China (largest trading partner of the US in goods). Mike Waltz (National Security Advisor nominee) echoes Trump's adversarial approach and has been involved in initiatives aimed at lessening US reliance on critical Chinese minerals. Moreover, Scott Bessent (Treasury Secretary nominee) is advocating for a gradual implementation of tariffs, praising them as a "significant revenue raiser". In this context of cabinet department co-ordination, a 60% tariff on Chinese goods is an increasingly plausible scenario. For the global economy, this may lead to supply chain disruptions as trade flows readjust.

What next?

The degree to which Trump's foreign policy cabinet vision is realised is contingent on the outcome of the Congressional hearings in January 2025. The more like-minded allies the President-elect can strategically place in top-level positions, the less internal resistance he will face in implementing his foreign policy agenda.