
UN BRACES AS TRUMP'S DETENTE WITH RUSSIA UPSETS BALANCE OF POWER

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President Donald Trump's outreach to Russia is reverberating through the United Nations, where U.S. allies worry that a partnership between Washington and Moscow could undermine a historic balance of power dating to the early days of the Cold War.

For decades, the five veto-wielding members of the 15-nation Security Council have fallen into two camps -- France, the U.K. and the U.S., referred to as the P3, on one side and Russia and China on the other.

The result could reshape the world body's response on conflicts from Syria to Ukraine and its approach to thorny decisions such as whether to deploy peacekeepers or condemn a country for human-rights violations. While the five permanent members can always veto resolutions or decisions, they usually try to win majority support from other Security Council members for their cause instead. That's where the new American president's approach comes in.

Foreign diplomats will be flying blind with Trump, said Richard Gowan, a fellow at the European Council on Foreign Relations. Many expect him to work more closely with Russia but are not sure how far this will go.

Few countries have more at stake than Ukraine, which is keenly focused on whether the U.S. will continue to stand with other nations in not recognizing Russia's annexation of Crimea, or if Washington softens its stance -- and eases sanctions -- in return for more cooperation against terrorism. Syria's beleaguered opposition, which Russia has targeted for bombing in its support of President Bashar al-Assad, could be wiped out if the U.S. shifts policy and withholds its support.

The U.K., which boasts of its special relationship to the U.S., is said to be deeply concerned that Trump's admiration for President Vladimir Putin will give Russia sway in eastern Europe, according to two senior officials, who asked not to be identified discussing a sensitive matter. U.K. Prime Minister Theresa May met with Trump in Washington Jan. 27, and Trump spoke with Putin by phone for about an hour the following day.

It's one thing to say you want to put America first and try new things, but this is not the right time to turn your back on alliances that have served us for 70 years," said Edward Luck, a professor at Columbia University's School of International and Public Affairs. You may think it's time to approach diplomacy differently but you cannot throw out the baby with the bathwater.

While Trump's new UN ambassador, Nikki Haley, was known as a conciliator in her past job as governor of South Carolina, she arrived at her new post last week with a stern warning indicating

shes ready to pursue Trumps pugnacious stance at the world body. The U.S. will have the backs of our allies and make sure that our allies have our back as well, she told reporters. For those that dont have our back, were taking names.

Haleys first test may come Tuesday after the U.S. called for an emergency Security Council meeting on an Iranian ballistic-missile launch. The U.S. and allies have condemned such tests as violating the spirit of the UN resolution that ratified the deal curbing Irans nuclear program. Iran says the resolutions prohibition applies only to missiles specially designed to carry nuclear warheads.

Mother Teresa

Under President Barack Obamas administration, the Russia-U.S. relationship soured to the point that the Security Councils work was largely paralyzed. Samantha Power, Obamas UN ambassador, and her Russian counterpart, Vitaly Churkin, feuded repeatedly over the deteriorating humanitarian situation in Syria.

In a Security Council hearing in December, Power charged Russia with complicity in massacring innocent civilians by backing Assads regime and pro-Assad militias. Churkin, in turn, said Power was trying to act like Mother Teresa and said the U.S. and U.K. were to blame for the rise of Islamic State because of their invasion of Iraq.

But in the most contentious debates, it was typically Russia on the defensive with backing from China, as the two countries sought to stop or slow UN condemnations or calls for cease-fires or other forms of intervention. China has supported Russias positions in vetoing five resolutions on Syria since 2011. Now, with Trump saying an alliance with Moscow would be an asset, it could be even harder for less powerful countries to get the support they need for such action.

Putin, Trump and Xi are a trio of most unfriendly leaders for multilateral cooperation since the end of the Cold War, if not the beginning of the UN, said Michael Doyle, a former UN assistant secretary-general, referring to Chinese President Xi Jinping.

Israels Settlements

The UN is already bracing to be on defense because Haley is taking her seat with support from a president and a U.S. Congress furious over a Security Council resolution in December critical of Israels settlements policy.

The Obama administrations unexpected decision to abstain from the resolution allowed it to pass, and U.S. lawmakers from both parties have fumed ever since. In her Jan. 18 confirmation hearing, Haley called the vote one of the bodys most outrageous. Members of Congress are proposing to cut or freeze funding for the UN as a result.

Asked about potential cuts in UN funding, White House spokesman Sean Spicer said last week that the president wants to be a strong steward of tax dollars. The U.S. provides about \$8 billion a year in contributions to the UN through the State Department and other agencies, or about a fifth of the world bodys total budget of \$40 billion.

On Jan. 4, new UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres called Trump and had a very positive discussion, according to his spokesman. In one of his few tweets directed at the UN, Trump last month said, The United Nations has such great potential, but right now it is just a club for people to get together, talk and have a good time. So sad.

Haleys biggest challenge is that shes part of an administration that carries a deep distrust toward multilateral institutions like the UN, said Reva Goujon, an analyst at Stratfor, the geopolitical advisory company.

Decidedly Weird

That suspicion as well as policy disagreements could lead to other ramifications at the UN. As bonds among the P3 loosen, the Russian-Chinese alliance at the UN could also suffer, Gowan said.

If Trump cozies up to Russia while continuing to pick fights with Beijing over trade and Taiwan, Security Council dynamics could become decidedly weird, Gowan said. We could see Moscow and Washington trying to collaborate at the UN while Beijing maneuvers to undermine their cooperation.

A key test may come in February, when Ukraine will hold the Security Councils rotating presidency. The country will be looking to ensure it still has the councils backing in its claims to Crimea and addressing instability on its eastern border.

The P3 have always been rock-solid supportive of Ukraine when it comes to the issue of Crimea, said Volodymyr Yelchenko, Ukraines ambassador to the UN. We have heard remarks of Mr. Trump on Crimea when he was a presidential candidate. But we need to understand that campaign rhetoric and real business may vary.

Kaynak/Source: