



Special US election brief *Implications of a Trump Presidency*

Donald Trump's election will significantly complicate US relations with the Gulf states and accelerate US retrenchment from its traditional alliances with these countries. President Barack Obama's administration was already beginning a process of revising the entire premise of these partnerships. The Middle East has become less vital for US strategic interests and the shale revolution has allowed US officials to reconsider their priorities in the region. Institutionally, Congress and the US establishment have become more critical of Saudi Arabia and its Gulf allies, as is underscored by the passage of the Justice Against Sponsors of Terrorism Act.

Unlike Hillary Clinton, Trump will not offer the Gulf states an opportunity for a smooth transition to a new type of relationship. The newly elected president will not be interested in accommodating Sunni leaders in the GCC that supported Clinton's bid while also criticizing him. On substance, the two sides will also fail to reach an understanding on the issues of radicalization of Muslims in the region. Trump will not be sympathetic to the challenges some Gulf leaders face in containing their conservative clerical establishment. Economically, a transaction-focused Trump will still be interested in developing commercial and trade relations with the Gulf countries. Moreover, as opposed to the predicaments the US faces on Asian trade, few factories are shutting down in the US to relocate to the Middle East.

Despite the challenges that are bound to arise in US-GCC relations, Trump is unlikely to break military ties with Gulf countries. The US military will probably emphasize the importance of US bases in the Middle East, or at the very least convince Trump to largely maintain the current configuration of forces in the Middle East and North Africa. However, Trump's unilateralist style also signals that Gulf countries will have less influence on US choices in the region.

A Trump administration will prioritize cooperation with the Kremlin to defeat the Islamic State and will not dedicate any significant resources to confronting Syrian President Bashar al Assad. Military efforts to defeat the group will ramp up as the two sides cooperate, and the Kremlin will be able to make a better case that Assad's regime is the only one capable of delivering stability in Syria. US cooperation with the Kurdish Democratic Union Party will be maintained under a Trump presidency, especially as he has criticized Islamist rebel groups during his campaign. However, on a strategic level, Trump will be much less enthusiastic about the opposition to Assad and show unwillingness to accommodate the viewpoints of US allies in the region.

The US will further distance itself from Saudi Arabia's military operations in Yemen. The US has already been doing so and officials have become more vocal in expressing their reservations. The president-elect will not be interested in bolstering alliances with countries that have either implicitly or explicitly backed Clinton. Lastly, Trump's win-focused mentality will shape a binary view among policymakers that the US should not support a losing side.

Trump's statements on what he will do regarding the Iran nuclear deal have been erratic. He has clearly stated he thought it was one of the worst deals ever. For a while, he said he would renegotiate it. Now he is saying he will "police" it while not hesitating to apply new sanctions over Iranian behavior outside the nuclear realm. If he does commit to pursuing a renegotiation, his efforts would produce a serious complication for the US, as the other parties to the agreement have no interest in doing so and there would be no international support for re-imposing sanctions. In addition, Iran could walk away from the deal in this scenario, leaving the US without a sanctions framework and with an active Iranian nuclear program. Trump is unlikely to want that. If policing mainly means making sure Iran does not cheat, that does not represent a change from the current situation. Risks would increase if Trump decides to hold Iran to higher standards on the nuclear accord, dissuade foreign banks from entering the country, or punish it over non-nuclear issues. Some of that will likely happen, but Iran will still receive vastly higher amounts of oil revenue and more foreign investment than in the pre-deal years, so it is unlikely to withdraw. The nuclear agreement is less secure than under Obama, but Trump will probably end up leaving it in place, even if he continues to criticize it.