

Rex Tillerson Rumoured to be on Verge of Quitting as Secretary of State

Those who wish the US to moderate its aggressive foreign policy should be deeply concerned by Rex Tillerson's despondency with his position as Secretary of State.

By [Adam Garrie](#)

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Rex Tillerson is reportedly deeply unhappy with the operational style of the Trump administration and has allegedly expressed disappointment that his State Department has been neglected by the White House. Furthermore, Tillerson is rumoured to be looking to quit his job as Secretary of State and possibly he is looking to do so quite soon.

While the source of these rumours are unnamed sources who spoke with CNN, not often a fully reliable way of deriving information, in this case there have been public indications from the very beginning of the Trump administration that Rex Tillerson was not altogether happy in his new position.

Before delving into the CNN rumours, here's what we know for a fact.

1. No room for Rex at the Trump table

During the dinner celebrating Donald Trump's inauguration, Tillerson did not sit with Trump at the top table nor with any of Trump's associates or family. Instead he dined with his wife at an apparently distant table for two. Meanwhile, at the more raucous Trump table, even Nigel Farage (aka Mr. Brexit) joined the fun and posed for an now infamous photo.



2. He didn't particularly want the job

Tillerson openly admitted that prior to being nominated for Secretary of State by Donald Trump, he planned to "...retire in March, this month. I was going to go to the ranch to be with my grandkids".

He further admitted that it was his wife who [persuaded him](#) to take the position and that he ultimately took her advice. In spite of Secretary of State being one of the top political positions in the United States, one which many Senators or Congressmen would do anything to get, Tillerson who had previously only ever worked in the private sector was not exactly enthusiastic about the job.

3. Trump contradicts him on Qatar

Shortly after Saudi Arabia led a diplomatic, economic and transport boycott of Qatar, Rex Tillerson affirmed what is still the official US position of neutrality.

Hours after Tillerson spoke, Donald Trump Tweeted a [contradictory statement](#) accusing Qatar of funding terrorism. By parroting one of Saudi's allegations against Qatar, Trump clearly seemed to contradict his top diplomat.

The schism could have merely be a symptom of the general disorganisation of the Trump White House, but it is indicative of a lack of communication between Trump on Tillerson on an issue over which one could reasonably expect dialogue between any President and any Secretary of State.

4. Tillerson cannot stop Nikki Haley from going rogue

After Nikki Haley called for 'regime change' in Syria in [direct contradiction](#) to Tillerson's statements opposing such an action, it was said that Tillerson demanded that Haley [clear her apparently rogue remarks with the State Department](#) as a precaution.

This didn't work for long, as in July of this year, less than three months after the admonition from Tillerson, Haley was once again [grandstanding](#) against Russia and Iran while attacking the Syrian government, all the while Tillerson was nowhere to be seen. When Tillerson did emerge, his statements were nothing like those coming from Haley, they were as expected, far more moderate.

If Tillerson's moderate positions on Syria can be overruled by someone who is technically his inferior, what kind of authority does Tillerson have as a 'boss'?

5. Tired at the G20

While Donald Trump and Vladimir Putin ended up speaking for hours during a meeting that was supposed to only last little over half an hour, Tillerson's post meeting remarks were clearly indicative of a man who was tired.

He mentioned during a post-meeting interview that at one point Melania Trump was sent in to try and convince Trump and Putin to wrap up their meeting but failed to achieve her goal. Tillerson's tone seemed to indicate that he wished she had succeed, not out of any dislike for Vladimir Putin whom Tillerson came to know and like while working in the private sector, but merely out of exhaustion.

In the same interview Tillerson said "maybe they've (Russia) got the right approach and maybe we've got the wrong approach(in Syria)". While Tillerson's words were welcomed by those hoping for more cooperative measures between Russia and the United States in Syria, the way Tillerson phrased his remarks sounded like a man arguing in favour of a good night's sleep, rather than a man passionately arguing for a new detente.

And now the rumours

CNN reports the following,

"Among those who viewed the President's public rebuke of Sessions as unprofessional, according to several sources, is Secretary of State Rex Tillerson, the former Exxon-Mobil CEO.

Tillerson has a growing list of differences with the White House, including a new debate over Iran policy and personnel. His frustration is hardly a secret and it has spilled out publicly at times. But friends sense a change of late.

For weeks, conversations with Tillerson friends outside of Washington have left the impression that he, despite his frustrations, was determined to stay on the job at least through the end of the year. That would allow time to continue efforts to reorganize the State Department and would mean he could claim to have put in a year as America's top diplomat.

But two sources who spoke to CNN on condition of anonymity over the weekend said they would not be surprised if there was a "Rexit" from Foggy Bottom sooner than that.

Both of these sources are familiar with Tillerson conversations with friends outside Washington. Both said there was a noticeable increase in the secretary's frustration and his doubts that the tug-of-war with the White House would subside anytime soon. They also acknowledged it could have been venting after a tough week, a suggestion several DC-based sources made

when asked if they saw evidence Tillerson was looking for an exit strategy”.

The most interesting aspect of these rumours in respect of policy concerns is over the question of Iran. CNN reports that Tillerson has differences with others in the White House on Iran but they fail to report what Tillerson’s position is. Is it one of moderation vis-a-vis others in the White House or an even more militant position? Given Tillerson’s track record of being a moderate on foreign policy, one could surmise with some degree of safety that Tillerson is less militant on Iran than others. If this is the case, it is a positive development for those who wish to avoid a would-be US attack on Iran.

As for Tillerson’s personal dislike of how the Trump administration is run and how understaffed and seemingly ignored the State Department is, these are indeed issues that should concern those who wish to see the Trump White House continue to pursue moderate foreign policies (by US standards) and move away from the ideological militancy of the Obama years.

Rex Tillerson was never a vocal man nor an attention grabbing man. In this sense he is a breath of fresh air which contrasts with Hillary Clinton who dragged Obama by the tail into the Libyan disaster and indeed from John Kerry who got to play the role of ‘Junior President’ from his position in the State Department.

Rex Tillerson has always personally struck me as understated, intelligent, professional and anti-ideological. Apart from having a Ron or Rand Paul style Secretary of State with a firm commitment to peace, Tillerson was probably the best kind of Secretary of State that the US could hope to have.

Donald Trump owes it to Rex Tillerson personally to discuss matters man to man if Tillerson is as dejected as many facts and corroborating rumours would indicate, not least because on top of all of it, Tillerson strikes me as a thoroughly decent man, a rarity in Washington, especially in 2017.

Adam Garrie is Managing Editor at [The Duran](#).

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