Even before taking office, Trump shaking up global order

Washington (AFP) – Donald Trump has not yet returned to the White House but is already thrusting himself to the front of international stage as he once again shatters diplomatic niceties.

As only the second former president elected to a non-consecutive term, Trump is at least a known quantity to world leaders. Even his knack for unpredictable behavior is predictable.

But Trump has quickly made clear that he is still capable of jaw-dropping statements, an approach that has rattled allies, while pleasing his supporters, who see this is as a way to force results.

As president-elect, Trump has refused to rule out the idea of military force to seize Greenland – an autonomous territory of NATO ally Denmark – as well as the Panama Canal, the vital waterway which the United States handed over 25 years ago.

Trump has also taunted NATO ally and long-friendly neighbor Canada, suggesting it should become a 51st state of the United States or face tariffs – his favorite tool to pressure both friends and foes.

Asked in a recent interview with ABC News if Trump was serious in his threats, Mike Waltz, his incoming national security advisor, said: “What he’s very serious about is the threats that we’re facing.”

Pointing to Chinese companies’ influence in the Panama Canal and Russian exertion of power in the warming Arctic, Waltz said that Trump “is always going to leave all options on the table” in a way “unlike, frankly, his predecessor.”

After ‘America is Back’

Outgoing President Joe Biden had declared that “America is Back” when he beat Trump in 2020 – and made no apologies for his stance in a valedictory address Monday at the State Department, insisting the United States was now stronger against its competitors.

Secretary of State Antony Blinken, introducing Biden, said the president had tasked him with rebuilding US alliances.

“I remember what you told me,” he said of Biden. “You said we don’t know when this is going to make a difference” but that close relationships eventually are “going to be critical.”

Robert Benson, a senior policy analyst at the left-leaning Center for American Progress, said that Trump was correct “to be identifying the threat posed by a revanchist Russia and by an expansionist China.”

“But he’s completely and totally off with the way that he’s alienated our partners and our allies – really pushing our European partners, in particular, to distance themselves from the United States,” he said.

Up and running

Trump’s style, to put it mildly, has differed with the customary presidential transitions in which the incoming administration waits until the January 20 inauguration to make policy moves.



A billboard calling for an end of the war between Israel and Hamas along with a portrait of US President-elect Donald Trump stands on top of a building in Jerusalem © Menahem Kahana / AFP

In a scene without parallel in recent US history, the emir of Qatar – a key intermediary in brokering a ceasefire to end the bloody 15-month war in Gaza – met together Monday both with Trump's Mideast envoy and the Biden White House's Middle East chief.

But despite Trump's often unorthodox and bombastic style, there are also signs that in some areas he may take a more traditional approach than expected.

Waltz, an Afghanistan veteran and congressman, and Senator Marco Rubio, his nominee for secretary of state, are both considered in the mainstream of the Republican Party.

They favor a security-heavy approach, and Rubio is expected to put a greater focus on countering leftists in Latin America.

Trump during his campaign had boasted that he could end the Ukraine war in a day, potentially by leveraging US aid to force Kyiv – which has received billions of dollars in weapons under Biden – into territorial concessions to Russia.

But Trump appointed a respected retired lieutenant general, Keith Kellogg, as an envoy on Ukraine, and Waltz initially has spoken of strengthening Ukraine to give it a better negotiating position.

Waltz said that Trump had already succeeded since his election of reviving prospects for diplomacy in a conflict that "had bogged down to a World War I-style meat grinder of people and resources with World War III consequences."

On a recent visit of European lawmakers to Washington, Lia Quartapelle, the chair of Italy's foreign affairs committee, said she had expected, especially as she comes from a left-wing party, to expect a "very tense discussion" with Republicans on Ukraine.

"That's not what we found," she said. "We found a clear idea of what US interests are, but also an availability to discuss things, starting with the continuation of support for Ukraine. Which surprised us."

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