

The Telegraph

Donald Trump's cabinet of oil men and generals is just what's needed to get US out of its rut



JEREMY WARNER

16 DECEMBER 2016 • 7:49AM



Trump's new administration is beginning to resemble a cross between the Fortune 500 rich list, a Goldman Sachs reunion party and a military junta

When I was growing up, one of the best things about my family's belated gesture to modernity – a black and white television set – was a drama series called *The Troubleshooters*.

This was the story of executive chicanery, globe trotting power politics, industrial espionage, and often explosive, high-octane action at an imagined international oil company named Mogul.

The series' creators obviously intended it, at least in part, as a morality tale on the evils of unfettered capitalism, for Mogul was a caricature of the uncaring, faceless, and stateless, profit-driven corporation of popular imagination.

If [global warming](#) had been on anyone's radar screen at the time, Mogul's no doubt casual attitude to the future of the planet would have been thrown into the mix as well.

Yet as a warning against ruthless, multi-national avarice, it had little effect on me. If I'd shown any aptitude for business, as opposed to merely writing about it, I'm quite sure I would have chosen this swashbuckling industry to make my mark.

Next to being a [James Bond-style spy](#), or a Hollywood movie director, there seemed no world quite so exciting, edgy, high living and conducive to exotic international travel as that of [Big Oil](#).



Exxon's Rex Tillerson; picked as Trump's Secretary of State despite, or perhaps because of, his closeness to Vladimir Putin

And if I'd got anywhere near the top, I'm also quite sure that by now I would have met and attempted to get close to the Russian president, Vladimir Putin. [Russia is one of the world's premier oil and gas producers](#); nobody who is serious about this industry can afford to ignore him, however slippery a specimen he might be.

It is therefore inevitable that [Donald Trump's latest pick for his new administration, Rex Tillerson](#), should have close connections with the Kremlin. As boss of Exxon Mogul (sorry, Mobil), he wouldn't have achieved such a powerful foothold in Russia if he didn't.

Tillerson is the very personification of the all-powerful corporate boss, jetting around the world, glad handing and negotiating deals with foreign heads of state. He may well have met more of them than the Queen, and as far as doing deals with them is concerned, he leaves career diplomats and government foreign ministers standing.

To my mind this makes him a near perfect choice as America's new Secretary of State. Predictably, however, his nomination has been met with squeals of outrage both in America and Europe.

For the moment, Russia remains one of America's sworn enemies, with wide-ranging international sanctions still outstanding. Exxon would benefit to the tune of billions of dollars if they were lifted.

Yet if you were a head hunter impartially seeking the best man for the job, you might well think Tillerson almost uniquely well qualified.

It's not just that he is a proven dealmaker who puts the interests of his company, Exxon, and its access to the energy sources it needs to stay in business, above all else – even on occasions the stated foreign policy objectives of his own country.

It is also that he is outstandingly successful at what he does. Sadly, there are very few political leaders we can still say that about. Both internationally and domestically, the political apparatchiks, policy wonks and lawyers who have colonised Western governments have made a terrible mess of things.

It's time for them to move over and let someone else have a go. However inexperienced in government Tillerson and other Trump appointees might be, they could scarcely do worse.



Gary Cohn: one of three Goldman Sachs alumni tapped to serve in Trump's administration

America has a long tradition of appointing political outsiders to the administration. The “can do” attributes that business and the military bring to government have on the whole served America well.

Yet Trump is taking this penchant for non politicians to a whole new level. It is hard to think of any line-up that more perfectly matches Dwight Eisenhower's depiction of government by the "military industrial complex" than this one. Generals, billionaires, business leaders and Wall Street financiers are utterly dominant.

One way or another, Goldman Sachs always has a placeman or two in the administration, but to have three alumni – Cohn, Mnuchin and Bannon – in key positions is unprecedented. Trump's cabinet has begun to resemble a kind of cross between the Fortune 500 rich list, a financier's reunion party and a military junta.



James "Mad Dog" Mattis, one of three military men so far named to serve in Trump's administration

It could admittedly all turn out very badly. The scope for cronyism is obvious. What's more, business people can find the transition to the intense public scrutiny of democratically-accountable government difficult and frustrating.

Most companies are benign dictatorships where even key decisions are automatically executed from the top down. Government by consent is by contrast necessarily more complex, compromised and slow-moving.

Yet if the likes of Tillerson can bring even half the determination shown in business to Trump's new administration, then we are in for a very different and decisive form of politics. Exxon once came first. [Now it will be America](#). No more half-hearted adventurism or senseless adherence to past loyalties and causes; just hard headed focus on the bottom line.

PHOTO: AP PHOTO/EVAN VUCCI

Born:

23 March 1952 (age 64)

From:Wichita Falls, Texas

Education:Bachelor of science degree in civil engineering from the University of Texas

Occupation:Chairman and CEO of ExxonMobil - the world's largest energy company

Did you know?

- In 2013, Tillerson received a Russian state honour, the Order of Friendship, for "strengthening cooperation in the energy sector"
- He has also served as the National President of the Boy Scouts of America

ExxonMobil

Tillerson joined Exxon Company, U.S.A. in 1975 as a production engineer and worked his way up the ranks to become Chairman and CEO in 2006.

Secretary of State

President-elect Donald Trump announced Tillerson as his choice for secretary of state in December 2016, saying he would be "a forceful and clear-eyed advocate for America's vital national interests". Tillerson's experience in diplomacy stems from making deals with foreign countries, but questions were immediately raised about the oil executive's relations with Russia.