



Democrats Have Good Reason to Confirm Mike Pompeo as Secretary of State

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Mike Pompeo should be promptly confirmed as secretary of State because he is well qualified, but also because this is an extraordinarily dangerous time for the United States to be without an effective secretary of State.

American diplomacy is tasked with advancing the interests of the United States while avoiding war. Any such success depends upon American diplomats credibly issuing threats, guarantees, and offers of help. This essential credibility, in turn, depends upon the relationship of America's secretary of State with the president. And this is perhaps the most serious reason why Pompeo is an excellent choice to be our next secretary of State.

Pompeo's credentials are, of course, superb: first in his class at West Point, a Harvard law degree, a distinguished (if brief) career in the House of Representatives, a tenure as CIA director marked by both competence and vision. The accolades go on and on. But none of this would matter much to foreign leaders if they didn't believe he has the president's ear.

Pompeo's predecessor at the State Department, Rex Tillerson, was a case in point. The cautious manner in which foreign leaders viewed Tillerson's pronouncements spoke volumes about the degree to which they believed that America's chief diplomat could capture and sway the opinion of the Commander-in-Chief.

The situation with Pompeo is fundamentally different. He was nominated to serve as secretary of State following a year of close, intimate contacts and daily briefings to the president on global threats and challenges. It is unlikely that Pompeo would have been Trump's pick if their personal chemistry wasn't good, or if the president wasn't comfortable with his judgement. Indeed, it is a most reasonable assumption that, as secretary of State, Pompeo would advance policies compatible with the president's thoughts and in turn have his support when difficult decisions are made.

Also critical to the success of any secretary of State is the ability to have a good working relationship with Congress. Pompeo's prior Congressional service gives him a good understanding of how that institution works, and his reputation for integrity and working across party lines deserves at least the level of bipartisan support he received when he was confirmed as CIA Director by a 66 to 32 vote. Democratic Senators with serious ideas about foreign policy should think twice about opposing the Pompeo nomination and thereby complicating their relationship with a man who will be the president's point-person for dealing peacefully with world problems grave enough to merit bipartisan unity.

For instance, Pompeo has been deeply involved in the historic breakthrough with North Korea, including his recent face-to-face negotiation with the North Korean dictator himself — an encounter that reportedly has advanced the emerging peace talks with that country. Bipartisan support should also be given because America needs his steady and, so far, effective ability to oversee this highly sensitive diplomatic process.

Meanwhile, the presence of American warfighters in Syria and Afghanistan is complicated by both unhelpful Russian activity and Iran's aggressive efforts to expand its influence in the Middle East. Having closely followed these events as CIA Director, Pompeo will be able to hit the ground running in managing those barely manageable challenges.

At the same time, an increasingly rogue Russia continues to violate international treaties, destabilize Ukraine, and attack democratic institutions in the West, even as America's problems with China include a possible trade war as well as ongoing tensions resulting from China's growing militarization of contested portions of the South China Sea. Will these issues remain manageable, or will they spin out of control? A Pompeo-led State Department will have a large role to play in the outcome.

These, and other, pressing global problems should hammer home the point that this is most definitely not the time for the United States to be without a secretary of State who is trusted and empowered to act decisively. Mike Pompeo is both, which is why the Senate should quickly put him to work.

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