

## **Donald Trump to pick 'Russia's friend' Exxon CEO Rex Tillerson as Secretary of State**

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**Washington:** President-elect Donald Trump is expected to nominate Exxon Mobil CEO Rex Tillerson as his secretary of State, a decision that would bring a business leader with close ties to Russia into the Cabinet.

### **Exxon Mobil CEO Rex Tillerson is expected to become Trmp's Secy of State**

Trump has privately signaled that he plans to tap Tillerson for the powerful Cabinet post, but had not formally offered him the job as of Saturday evening, according to people who have spoken with Trump and his transition team.

Some advisers worry that Tillerson's Russia connections would lead to a contentious Senate confirmation hearing and keep alive questions about Trump's own relationship with Moscow.

Trump and Tillerson met privately in New York on Saturday, their second meeting in a week. The president-elect's transition team said an announcement was not expected over the weekend.

However, the anonymous sources cautioned that nothing is final till Trump officially announces the pick probably next week.

Tillerson, 64, is the Texas-based oil company's CEO since 2006 and had moved ahead of other candidates for the position of the country's top diplomat after former New York Mayor Rudy Giuliani, Trump's favourite to be the next US Secretary of State, dropped out of the competition on Friday.

According to the sources, former US ambassador to the UN John Bolton would be Deputy Secretary of State "for day-to-day management of the department".

Like Trump, Tillerson has no government experience and so far little is known of his views about foreign affairs.

According to the Wall Street Journal, sources said Tillerson's initial emergence as a candidate for the country's top diplomat surprised senior Exxon officials, including Tillerson himself.

But in Tillerson, a seasoned business executive, some Trump advisers saw a "mold-breaking pick who would bring an executive's experience to the diplomatic role", the journal reported.

Tillerson joined Exxon in 1975 and has spent his entire career at the company.

As Exxon's CEO, Tillerson, set to retire from the company next year, oversees business operations in more than 50 countries and has known Russian President Vladimir Putin since 1990s when they first met.

His nomination as the country's top diplomat would be the nascent Trump administration's most concrete outreach yet to Russian President Vladimir Putin. Success in Russia required aligning the company's interests with those of the Russian government, mettle and good relations with Putin. Exxon steadily expanded its Russian business even as its rivals faced expropriation and regulatory obstacles, and in 2013 Putin bestowed the Order of Friendship on Tillerson.

Russia's Order of Friendship in 2013 is a state decoration to reward foreign nationals whose work is aimed at the betterment of relations with Russia.

In an interview airing Sunday, Trump praised Tillerson as "much more than a businessman."

"He's a world-class player," Trump said on Fox News Sunday. "To me, a great advantage is he knows many of the players and he knows them well. He does massive deals in Russia, he does massive deals, not for himself, for the company."

Trump's own relationship with Russia was an issue through much of the campaign. The CIA has concluded with "high confidence" that Russia sought to influence the U.S. election on behalf of the Republican, an assessment Trump has rejected.

The president-elect's deliberations over his pick to lead the State Department — particularly his consideration of Mitt Romney for the post — have exposed anew the deep rivalries within Trump's team. Campaign manager Kellyanne Conway warned publicly that Trump supporters would feel betrayed if he were to choose a fierce rival for the post, especially given that some loyal allies — most notably former New York City Mayor Rudy Giuliani — also wanted the job.

Giuliani officially took himself out of consideration for the Cabinet on Friday, though his standing had already been diminished. In addition to Romney, Trump has also been considering Tennessee Sen. Bob Corker and John Bolton, the former U.S. ambassador to the United Nations. Trump's team has discussed bringing Bolton on as a No. 2 to Tillerson.

The people who have spoken to Trump and the transition team about the State Department decision insisted on anonymity because they were not authorized to discuss the internal deliberations publicly.

Internal divisions were also complicating efforts to set up Trump's senior White House staff. Longtime aides are fearful of being left out of the mix as incoming White House chief of staff Reince Priebus builds out the West Wing team. Trump had given Priebus wide authority in the decision-making over White House jobs.

- (With AP inputs)