

TEAM TRUMP

SELECTED CABINET AND CABINET-LEVEL APPOINTEES AND TOP ADVISORS *CABINET-LEVEL

VICE PRESIDENT-ELECT MIKE PENCE 57

SECRETARY OF STATE REX TILLERSON 64

ATTORNEY GENERAL JEFF SESSIONS 69

TREASURY SECRETARY STEVEN MNUCHIN 53

DEFENSE SECRETARY GENERAL JAMES MATTIS 66

HOMELAND SECURITY JOHN KELLY 66

COMMERCE WILBUR ROSS 79

LABOR ANDREW PUZDER 66

ENERGY RICK PERRY 66

HEALTH TOM PRICE 62

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY SCOTT PRUITT 48

ADVISORS

CHIEF STRATEGIST STEVE BANNON 63

CHIEF OF STAFF REINCE PRIEBUS 44

SENIOR WHITE HOUSE ADVISOR JARED KUSHNER 36

NATIONAL SECURITY ADVISOR MICHAEL FLYNN 57

EDUCATION: BETSY DEVOS (58)

TRANSPORTATION: ELAINE CHAO (63)

HOUSING AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT: BEN CARSON (65)

INTERIOR: RYAN ZINKE (55)

AGRICULTURE: SONNY PERDUE (70)



(From top, clockwise) Barack Obama and his wife Michelle Obama greet Donald Trump and his wife Melania for tea before Trump's inauguration at the White House in Washington, US, yesterday; former Democratic presidential candidate Hillary Clinton and former president Bill Clinton arrive to attend the swearing-in ceremony of Trump; people watch the ceremony on a screen in Times Square in New York; and a woman holds a placard thanking the Obamas.

Trump's shock rise to presidency

Less than 17 months -- that's how long it took Donald J Trump to reach the White House, besting rivals who had been chasing that dream for years. But his political ambitions go back nearly three decades. In 1998, on the set of Oprah Winfrey's talk show, the provocative billionaire first signalled his interest in the Oval Office. "I think I'd win. I'll tell you what, I wouldn't go in to lose," he boasted to the iconic television host. "People are tired of seeing the United States ripped off," added the real estate tycoon. The author of the best-selling "The Art of the Deal" was then just 42. He ultimately declined to run that year, but the seed was planted. In 1999, Trump took the idea a step further. He quit the Republican Party and announced an exploratory bid under the Reform Party banner, with neither a conservative or liberal agenda but backing for America's "workers." Trump abandoned his bid after four months, but that early run helped shape his nationalist, populist orientation that would prove crucial to his success 17 years later. Fast forward to June 2015, when a new race for the White House was cranking up. Hillary Clinton and Bernie

Sanders dominated the Democratic field, while 11 Republicans including Jeb Bush, Marco Rubio and Ted Cruz were already running for their party's nomination. In the glittering lobby of Trump Tower in Manhattan, Trump threw his hat in the ring pledging to "make America great again" -- a vow that would become his campaign slogan. A month earlier, he had not even been included in Republican primary polling, and was known far more for his role as the brash reality TV boss on "The Apprentice." By July, he was leading in the polls. His candidacy proved a blockbuster. As controversy swirled and he flung his harsh rhetoric in multiple directions, Trump never apologized. As his presence on cable news channels grew, he endured endless criticism while soaking up the benefits of wall-to-wall coverage. The political establishment collectively cringed on December 7, 2015 when he proposed that Muslims be barred from entering the United States -- one month after terror attacks in Paris left 130 people dead. "The Donald" nevertheless rose steadily in the polls: from 25 percent, to 30, and then 35 percent approval among Republican likely voters.

On the eve of the first primaries in February 2016, the Republican establishment became convinced that the anti-Washington candidate would hit a support ceiling of 30 or 35 percent, and that another candidate would ultimately consolidate the remainder of the party's support and oust Trump. But the party's base appeared to be in open revolt, riding the anti-establishment wave embodied by Trump and rival Ted Cruz, Democrats, who were better funded and enjoyed support from incumbent President Barack Obama.

35 WORDS THAT MAKE A US PRESIDENT I do solemnly swear (or affirm) that I will faithfully execute the Office of President of the United States, and will to the best of my ability, preserve, protect and defend the Constitution of the United States

Trump expertly tapped into the anti-elitism that swelled in communities across America, and despite his brutal rhetoric, he managed to rally most of his party. At campaign events that often attracted tens of thousands of supporters, he portrayed Clinton as the ultimate political insider, But in the campaign's final weeks, the political winds began to shift in Trump's favor. On October 7, WikiLeaks began publishing emails hacked from Clinton campaign chairman John Podesta's account, laying bare the cynicism and indiscretion of her campaign's inner workings. Combined with a surprise relaunch of an FBI probe into the email case, the revelations proved devastating for Clinton, who thought she had weathered that storm. Even on the eve of the November 8 election, polls suggested the damage was not enough to reverse the trend line of a Clinton triumph. But in a surprisingly close election, broad antipathy against Clinton combined with Trump's change-agent message was enough for the political novice to gain ground in several "Rust Belt" states. The world was stunned to see many white working-class voters in those states -- who once supported Obama -- favoring the Republican candidate. Even the brash billionaire appeared stunned by his own win. "I sort of thought I lost," Trump said, recalling how he had purposely rented a small New York ballroom for election night.

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These pictures show demonstrators in US, Palestine and Philippines rallying against Donald Trump on the eve his inauguration as US president. Numerous demonstrations, some violent, are being going on or planned in US and around the world as Trump takes oath as the 45th president of United States.

Outrage as IS destroys monuments in Palmyra

The Islamic State group has demolished more treasured monuments in Syria's ancient Palmyra, a month after capturing it from government forces, the country's antiquities chief said yesterday. The news is a fresh blow for the Unesco World Heritage site, which had already been ravaged by the jihadist group during the nine months it held the site before being expelled in March last year. "Local sources told us that 10 days ago Daesh destroyed the tetrapylon, a 16-columned structure that marked one end of the ancient city's colonnade, Maamoun Abdulkarim told AFP using an Arabic acronym for IS. "Yesterday (Thursday), we received satellite photographs from our colleagues at Boston University showing damage to the facade of the Roman amphitheatre," he added. Before being forced out of Palmyra in a Russian-backed offensive in March, IS razed world-famous temples and tower tombs at the site. The tetrapylon, built during the rule of the Roman Emperor Diocletian in the 3rd Century AD, consisted of four sets of four pillars each supporting massive stone comices. The monument had suffered considerable damage over the centuries and only one of the 16 pillars was still standing in its original Egyptian pink granite. The rest were cement replicas. In a statement, Irina Bokova, director general of the Paris-based UN cultural agency Unesco, described the wrecking as "a new war crime and an immense loss for the Syrian people and for humanity." "This new blow against cultural heritage... shows that cultural cleansing led by violent extremists is seeking to destroy both human lives and historical monuments in order to deprive the Syrian people of its past and its future," Bokova said. Moscow yesterday deplored the new destruction, with President Vladimir Putin's spokesman Dmitry Peskov calling it "a real tragedy from the point of view of cultural and historical heritage." Asked whether the Russian military is likely to step in to recapture Palmyra for a second time, Peskov said only that: "Russian military continues to support the Syrians in battling terrorists."

ROHINGYA DEFENCE Myanmar lashes out at Malaysia PM Najib Razak

Myanmar's government lashed out at Malaysian Prime Minister Najib Razak yesterday, accusing him of using the Rohingya crisis unfolding in Rakhine state for his own "political interests." The premier of Muslim-majority Malaysia has been a vocal critic of Myanmar since violence erupted in the north of the state in October, when the army started hunting attackers behind deadly raids on police border posts. Since then at least 66,000 Rohingyas have fled to neighbouring Bangladesh alleging security forces are carrying out a campaign of rape, torture and mass killings that Najib has said amounts to "genocide".

OBAMA'S LEGACY

As Barack Obama steps down as US president after 8 years, here are 10 things his presidency may be remembered for:

- MAKING HISTORY AS FIRST BLACK PRESIDENT: If historians were to write only one thing about Barack Hussein Obama, they would likely note that -- 143 years after slavery was abolished -- a young Illinois senator became the first black president of the United States. Obama, just 47 at his 2009 inauguration, harnessed magisterial oratory to rally a diverse electoral coalition behind a message of "hope and change." In office, Obama however sometimes struggled to turn his poetry into the prose of governance. SAVING US FROM ECONOMIC FREEFALL: Obama's first term in office was dominated by economic freefall. A real estate crisis spawned a financial meltdown that torpedoed Wall Street banks and lenders, and was metastasizing into an economic crisis of global proportions. Outgoing president George W Bush and the Federal Reserve had kicked off the government's first panicked efforts at containment, but Obama faced down ideological opposition to large fiscal stimulus, extending government spending by \$831 billion and providing ballast to the economy. As he leaves office, the political and social aftershocks of that financial cataclysm are still being felt, but the economy has added jobs for 75 straight months. HUNTING DOWN OSAMA BIN LADEN: "Tonight, I can report to the American people and to the world that the United States has conducted an operation that killed Osama bin Laden." With those words on May 2, 2011, Obama exorcised the anger and frustration of millions of Americans -- that the most powerful country on earth could not hold the man accountable for the 9/11 attacks. The risky special forces operation was also illustrative of Obama's controversial drone-and-raid approach to counterterrorism. As he leaves office, al-Qaeda offshoots and affiliates remain potent, but their leadership in Afghanistan and Pakistan has been decimated. PARTISAN RANCOR IN POLITICS: "It's one of the few regrets of my presidency -- that the rancor and suspicion between the parties has gotten worse instead of better." Obama said in his final State of the Union address. From the moment Obama was elected, Republicans in Congress vowed to oppose him tooth and nail. Efforts to close the prison at Guantanamo Bay and enact gun controls -- even after the 2012 massacre of young students in Newtown, the emotional nadir of his presidency -- would fall victim to partisan rancor. NUCLEAR DEAL WITH IRAN: For more than two decades, the United States had rolled out sanctions and covert actions to prevent arch-foe Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon. Obama tried a different tack, engaging in secret talks with the Islamic Republic. That gambit ultimately yielded a deal that saw Iran halt its sprint toward a nuclear weapon, in return for substantial sanctions relief and a dollop of international legitimacy. The pact would strain US relations with Iran's enemies Israel and Saudi Arabia, but prevented a nuclear arms race in the Middle East and defused tensions between Iran and the United States that have simmered since the 1979 Islamic Revolution. SYRIA REDLINES AND US INACTION: No international crisis tested Obama's foreign policy or his high bar for US military intervention like Syria. Even when Bashar al-Assad defied Obama's red line on chemical weapons use and killed countless thousands of civilians -- along with Russian and Iranian forces -- the man who came to office on an anti-war ticket rejected calls to step in. Syria will likely be in crisis for years to come. Critics will long argue about whether Obama's policy was sensible and to what degree his decision damaged America's reputation, allowed the Islamic State group to grow, fueled a flow of migrants that destabilized Europe, and allowed Russia and Iran to extend influence in the region. A CLIMATE FRIENDLY PRESIDENT: After the climate skepticism of Bush, Obama's eight years in office resulted in a tidal wave of environmental legislation, protecting marine ecosystems, curbing carbon emissions and boosting renewable energy. In a bid to ingrain environmentalism into America's body politic, Obama hiked Alaskan glaciers, snorkeled at Midway Island and rushed through ratification of the Paris climate accord. But Obama's environmental agenda is likely to come under sustained assault from his successor, putting the durability of that legacy into question. OBAMACARE: Democrats had tried and failed for decades to provide Americans with universal health care. Obama wasn't quite able to do that but he extended insurance coverage to tens of millions of citizens who previously had none. Republicans derided the "Obamacare" plan as socialism incarnate, at one point claiming it would even create "death panels." But they failed to stop it from passing. They may yet have a crack at repealing it under Donald Trump's watch. RACIAL TENSIONS IN US: Many hoped that America's first black president would help the nation overcome racial inequality. But the man elected with the overwhelming support of the nation's minority voters of all colors disappointed many. Racial tensions -- underscored by police shootings of unarmed black men and conspiracy theories about Obama's birthplace -- persisted, and the president remained cautious about weighing in on the issue -- too cautious, for some. RESTORATION OF CUBA AND LATAM TIES: Obama's trip to Cuba may be remembered in the same way as Richard Nixon's visit to China, but in truth it was the capstone of a much broader effort to improve US relations with Latin America. Resurgent left-wing populists in the region had kindled past memories of "yanqui imperialism" -- US-led coups, death squads and heavy-handed intervention. Barely 100 days after Obama took office, he held regional leaders at a Summit of the Americas that the United States had changed. The approach was to deny leaders like Venezuela's Hugo Chavez any excuses for sideshow anti-Americanism.

Give him a chance

Ivanka Trump asks US to give her dad a chance

Give Donald Trump a chance, incoming first daughter Ivanka has asked fellow Americans as her father became the president of a sharply divided country. Yet in an interview with ABC News on Friday, aired on the eve of the inauguration, the businesswoman and mother of three also admitted to urging her father to cut out some of his more controversial tweets. "My father is an incredible unifier. For every critic, I would say give him time. Let

