

Trump puts lobbying ban on officials

REUTERS, Washington

President Donald Trump on Saturday put restrictions on the kind of lucrative lobbying gigs his White House aides and other administration officials can accept after they leave government.

Trump, whose campaign was based in part on getting rid of Washington insiders, had pledged during last year's election campaign to "drain the swamp" of political practices that he said made politicians beholden to business interests.

On his executive order making good on that pledge, Trump said his appointees would agree to refrain from lobbying their own agency for five years after leaving, and would not lobby any government appointee for two years.

Trump's order also requires his officials to agree to a lifetime ban on working on behalf of foreign governments or foreign political parties.

Trump, under pressure, has put his sons in charge of his company. Ethics watchdogs have said the arrangement does not prevent conflicts of interest.



(From left, clockwise) Protesters gather at JFK International Airport against Donald Trump's executive order in New York; a girl holds a sign in support of Muslim family at Los Angeles International Airport (LAX) in Los Angeles; and demonstrators block traffic at the international arrival terminal at San Francisco International Airport, California. Pictures were taken on Saturday.

PHOTO: AFP



Trump shakes up world in a week

AFP, Washington

Donald Trump hurtled through his first week in power, punching out at critics, dishing up "alternative facts," polarising public opinion and making good on an electoral promise to shake up Washington.

Just a week ago, an outsider who never before held elected office rode into town. Seven days later, norms and doctrine that have guided the United States for decades are being re-examined.

The establishment "elites" in big cities, in politics and the media were no longer the technocrats in charge of the world's only superpower, they were the enemy.

The new president also put the rest of the world on notice.

The era of Trump would be the era of "America first," he



said, of naked self-interest and zero-sum diplomacy. Old alliances would be reassessed, new alliances would be explored.

Before his inauguration, many asked if the presidency would change Donald Trump, or whether Donald Trump would change the presidency.

Barely 20 minutes into his four-year term, anyone who was listening had their answer.

Before arriving to the Oval Office, Trump's strategists had decided to use the first few weeks to unleash a daily wave of executive orders. The aim was to unbalance opponents, define Trump as a man of action and slake his supporters' thirst for change.

Trump ripped up a trans-Pacific trade deal designed to counterbalance China's regional economic power, imposed a ban on refugees from Syria and migrants from seven other Muslim countries. He ordered planning to begin to build a wall on Mexico's southern border.

The United States, a nation founded by migrants, was now willing to shut its doors.

Not since Obama's election or perhaps the Iraq War has America's image around the world changed so dramatically and so quickly.

"Get used to it," said Trump aide Kellyanne Conway, boasting that Trump had delivered a "shock to the system."

"And he's just getting started," she said.

Mindy Finn, who ran as an independent vice presidential candidate, summed up Trump's strategy as "sow chaos, deepen division and consolidate power."

For his harshest critics, the question is now whether Donald Trump breaks the presidency, or whether the president breaks Donald Trump.

Trump gives generals 30 days for anti-IS strategy

AFP, Washington

President Donald Trump signed an executive order Saturday giving the US military 30 days to devise a plan to "defeat" the Islamic State group.

The plan makes good on a key campaign pledge of Trump, who mocked and criticized the slow pace of his predecessor Barack Obama's progress in the fight against the extremist fighters.

The text, which calls for a "comprehensive strategy and plans for the defeat of ISIS," is seen as meaning more US forces and military hardware moving into Iraq and Syria.

Pentagon chief James Mattis is also tasked with recommending changes to US rules of engagement and policy restrictions to eliminate those that "exceed the requirements of international law regarding the use of force against ISIS" under the order, which also seeks to cut the group's financial support.

Trump and his Russian counterpart Vladimir



Putin agreed in a telephone call to establish "real coordination" against the Islamic State group in Syria, according to the Kremlin.

"We have to get rid of ISIS. We have no choice," Trump told Fox News in an interview broadcast Thursday, using another acronym for the jihadist group.

"President Trump might be looking for something with quicker results, that could put some more options on the table," retired lieutenant general David Barno, who led coalition forces in Afghanistan from 2003 to 2005, told National Public Radio on Friday.

According to reports, an escalation of the US role could involve more US armor and helicopters engaging in the assaults on IS positions together with Iraqi, Turkish and Kurdish forces. Trump "could elect to put American boots on the ground in larger numbers," Barno said.

"That all entails new uses of military power... and that opens the prospect of a deeper involvement with more casualties."

Trump and his Russian counterpart Vladimir

CALLS TO PUTIN, WESTERN LEADERS

Trump vows better Russia ties, reassures Nato allies

AFP, Washington

President Donald Trump vowed Saturday to improve floundering ties with Russia in a phone call with Russian President Vladimir Putin, while also reassuring close US allies he supports Nato.

In a flurry of calls that began early in the morning and rounded out an already frantically paced week, Trump spoke with Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, German Chancellor Angela Merkel, Putin, Hollande and Australian Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull.

Trump's friendly stance toward Putin, whom France and Germany accuse of seeking to undermine Western unity, is being scrutinised since he won the US election in November.

The White House hailed the call with Putin as a "significant start" to better US-Russia ties, while the Kremlin said the pair agreed to develop relations "as equals" and to establish "real coordination" against the Islamic State group.

Trump took office last week with US-Russia relations at new Cold War-level lows amid accusations by American intelligence agencies that the Kremlin hacked Democratic Party emails as part of a pro-Trump campaign to influence November's election.

The president -- who has raised the prospect of easing sanctions imposed against Russia after its annexation of Ukraine's Crimean Peninsula in 2014 -- has cast doubt on whether Russia meddled in the election.

In his call with Merkel, Trump agreed on Nato's "fundamental importance," the White House said.

US provides significant funding to Nato, and Trump has urged other member nations to step up their contributions.

The conversations gave the US president an early opportunity to explain new policies that have baffled and unnerved much of the rest of the world -- particularly his order to temporarily halt all refugee arrivals and those of travelers from Iran, Iraq, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, Syria and Yemen.

Travel agents in Tehran said Saturday they had been instructed by foreign airlines, including Emirates, Etihad and Turkish Airlines, not to sell US tickets and that Iranians holding American visas were not being allowed to board US-bound flights.

'Gift to extremists'

Iran slams Trump's move

AFP, Tehran

Iran's Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif yesterday said that US President Donald Trump's decision to ban arrivals from seven Muslim majority countries was "a great gift to extremists".

"#MuslimBan will be recorded in history as a great gift to extremists and their supporters," Zarif said as part of a string of tweets.

"Collective discrimination aids terrorist recruitment by deepening fault-lines exploited by extremist demagogues to swell their ranks."

Trump on Friday signed a sweeping executive order to suspend refugee arrivals and bar visas for travellers from Iran, Iraq, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, Syria and Yemen.

Iran's foreign ministry had earlier released a statement saying it would reciprocate with a ban on Americans entering the country. But Zarif added that its restrictions would not apply to Americans who already have a valid visa.

With more than one million Iranians living in the United States, the travel restrictions are expected to cause chaos for students, businessmen and families travelling between the two countries.

Travel agents in Tehran said Saturday they had been instructed by foreign airlines, including Emirates, Etihad and Turkish Airlines, not to sell US tickets and that Iranians holding American visas were not being allowed to board US-bound flights.

NEWS IN brief

Palestinian killed in WB

AFP, Nablus

A Palestinian, 19, was shot dead and five others were wounded by Israeli soldiers yesterday at the Jenin camp in the occupied West Bank. Palestinian medical sources said. An Israeli army spokeswoman said the soldiers had opened fire after entering the camp and being attacked with explosive devices.

Air raids kill 10 in Syria

AFP, Beirut

Air strikes killed 10 civilians including seven children in areas near a town held by the Islamic State group in north Syria on Saturday, a monitor said. The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said regime airstrikes killed a child in Tadif on Saturday, while Turkish air raids left nine civilians dead including six children in Al-Uraima and Bezaa.

Fillon hit by fresh scam

AFP, Paris

French presidential hopeful Francois Fillon yesterday faced fresh allegations of misusing public funds following claims that his wife had been paid for a fake parliamentary job. French investigative website Mediapart reported late Saturday that Fillon had pocketed money personally while a member of the French senate, which he left in 2007.

3rd Pak activist 'safe'

AFP, Islamabad

A third Pakistani activist who went missing earlier this month is safe, his family told AFP yesterday, a day after two of the other disappeared men were confirmed secure. The activist, named only as Asim by his family, was among five who went missing more than two weeks ago, sparking fears of a government crackdown and resulting in protests.



Congress vice president Rahul Gandhi (R) and Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister and Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav gesture during a joint roadshow through the streets of Lucknow yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

'57 dead' in US raid on Qaeda in Yemen

AFP, Aden

A US raid in Yemen killed 41 suspected al-Qaeda militants and 16 civilians yesterday, an official said, in what would be America's first military action in the country under President Donald Trump.

Eight women and eight children were among those killed in the dawn raid in Yakla district, in the central province of Baidha, said the provincial official, who did not want to be named, and tribal sources.

Sources in the region said the raid targeted the houses of three tribal chiefs linked to al-Qaeda.

The provincial official said Apache helicopters also struck a school, a mosque and a medical facility which were all used by al-Qaeda militants.

Other sources spoke of US commandos taking part in the operation, but it was not possible to verify the information.

Meanwhile, fierce battles between Yemeni government forces and Shia rebels on the country's west coast have killed more than 100 fighters in the past 24 hours, officials said yesterday. The bodies of at least 90 Houthi rebels were taken to a hospital in the Red Sea city of Hodeida, which is controlled by the insurgents, while 19 dead soldiers were taken to the southern port city of Aden, the medical and military sources said.

War with US 'becoming practical reality': China

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War with the US under Donald Trump is "not just a slogan" and becoming a "practical reality", a senior Chinese military official has said.

The remarks were published on the People's Liberation Army website, apparently in response to the aggressive rhetoric towards China from America's new administration.

They communicated a view from inside the Central Military Commission, which has overall authority of China's armed forces.

Quoted in the South China Morning Post, the official from the Commission's Defence Mobilisation Department wrote: "A war 'within the president's term' or 'war breaking out tonight' are not just slogans, they are becoming a practical reality."

The official also called for military deployments in the tense South and East China Seas and for a missile defence system to guard the Korean peninsula, another

regional hotspot, the Post reported.

The US should also reconsider its strategy in the Asia-Pacific region, the official wrote.

Trump and members of his administration have consistently voiced a hard line against China. Trump has branded the country a "currency manipulator" and accusing the country of underhand trading and economic tactics.

But more significantly in security terms, Trump has also ignored the US's longstanding 'One China' policy, publicly engaging with the President of Taiwan, Tsai Ing-wen, in a move that was hugely antagonising for Beijing.

China strongly regards Taiwan as part of its territory and the US has tacitly respected this for decades, but Trump signalled a departure from this policy.

Secretary of State Rex Tillerson has also advocated a US naval blockade of artificial Chinese islands in the South China Sea – which Beijing could interpret as an act of war.