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Subject: Federal Insider: Will Trump continue Obama's national security diversity efforts?

Will Trump continue Obama's national security diversity efforts?

By Joe Davidson

President Obama speaks with National Security Adviser Susan E. Rice, beside former British Prime Minister David Cameron, at the closing plenary session of the April 2016 Nuclear Security Summit at the Washington Convention Center. EPA/MICHAEL REYNOLDS

Is national security workforce diversity really an issue when the president's national security adviser is a powerful black woman with a spacious White House office just down the hallway from her boss, a black man who embodies diversity?

Yes. It's a big, persistent problem.

The encouraging news is Susan E. Rice has confronted the issue head-on, with solid support from her boss, President Obama. She was the driving force behind his [October presidential memorandum](#) that instructed agencies to take a series of actions "promoting diversity and inclusion in the national security workforce."

Yet, despite those efforts, and others going back at least to the [Foreign Service Act of 1980](#) that said "the Foreign Service should be representative of the American people," the national security workforce remains starkly under-representative of the country it serves, particularly at the higher levels.

This reality makes the fate of the Obama administration's diversity efforts all the more concerning. What will become of them when this administration ends next week and that of President-elect Donald Trump begins?

The tenor of Trump's campaign and his history of racism and ethnic degradation provide no confidence for diversity advocates. And national

security intelligence staffers generally have reason to be wary, given his disparagement of their finding that Russian President Vladimir Putin ordered [cyber hacking to promote Trump's election campaign](#), thus tainting the legitimacy of his electoral college victory.

“Clearly, President-elect Trump lacks a history of sustained serious attention to inclusion and diversity,” Ernest J. Wilson III, University of Southern California dean of journalism and communications, said with restraint. He edited the book on this, called [“Diversity and U.S. Foreign Policy.”](#)

The Trump transition team did not respond to a request for comment.

Rice would not comment on what Trump might do regarding Obama’s memorandum, but during a Florida International University speech in May, as Trump was capturing the Republican nomination, she spoke against “voices out there that disparage our diversity” without naming him. “Those voices can be loud.”

Diversity, she told the graduates is “a national security imperative.”

The White House rejects criticism that the presidential memorandum was late, being issued in the final months of Obama’s eight years, and not only because we now know who will follow him. A White House statement pointed to his 2011 executive order establishing a coordinated governmentwide diversity initiative and a list of national security agency programs.

The October memorandum “was in large part to formalize and make more durable many of the practices that had been put in place over the course of years,” the statement said.

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If diversity is a national security imperative, statistics indicate an unfinished national security duty persists. Two [blatant examples](#) — 90 percent of the State Department’s Senior Executive Service is white. The Senior Foreign Service is 87 percent white.

The Senior Foreign Service feels “less diverse in terms of racial and ethnic background today than it was 20 years ago when I started serving in the State Department,” Rice said during an interview. She didn’t have statistics on that point, but the anecdotal observations of the veteran ambassador and diplomat are telling.

So was the importance of this issue to Rice by her willingness to discuss it Friday, just two days after the death of her mother — who was a strong diversity influence. The career of [Lois Dickson Rice](#), sometimes called the “mother of the Pell Grants” for her work in implementing the college financial aid program, was marked by inclusion and expansion efforts, as has been the work of her daughter and son John Rice, whose Management Leadership for Tomorrow helps prepare people of color for senior management positions.

Diversity, Susan E. Rice said, “is kind of a family enterprise.”

The presidential memorandum she was instrumental in drafting focuses on data and directs agencies to take a series of actions to promote diversity. It calls for a report to the president no later than 120 days after its Oct. 5 date. That would be two weeks after Trump takes over, but Rice is confident it will be ready before Obama leaves.

Ruth A. Davis, a retired pioneering black career diplomat gives Obama a B+ for his national security diversity efforts, saying they “might have been a bit more pronounced.” He missed an A in part because he could have selected more African American national security political appointees. She was the Foreign Service Institute’s first black director and the first woman of color appointed [director general of the Foreign Service](#).

While not offering any view on what Trump might do, top administration appointees are working to ingrain efforts to improve federal workforce diversity efforts before they leave.

After the election, Rice met with midlevel career staffers to ensure the president’s memorandum is actually implemented. Other administration officials [met with career employees](#) from across government in November.

“Given the nature of this campaign on this issue of diversity and inclusion,” Office of Management and Budget Director Shaun Donovan told them, that is “all the more reason” they “should be thinking about how you step up, how you join together in the coming months and years to make sure that this issue gets carried on.”

That’s the challenge.

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