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Nikki Haley will be Trump's mouthpiece to the world. Can she speak the language?

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Nikki Haley now becomes Donald Trump's foreign policy explainer-in-chief to the world, and that's going to be a very tough job.

While Trump will nominate the Republican governor of South Carolina to be the US ambassador to the United Nations, he and his national security team in Washington will set American foreign policy.

South Carolina Governor Nikki Haley has in the past been a bitter critic of President-elect Donald Trump, but now she'll represent him at the United Nations.

The President-elect has shown little enthusiasm for United States alliances in place since the end of World War II. And Haley will report to a boss who's known for his lack of diplomacy, particularly when it comes to foreign affairs.

Haley will be "the pleasant face on what is likely to be a very harsh administration internationally," said Ted Galen Carpenter, senior fellow for defense and foreign policy studies at Washington's Cato Institute, a libertarian research group.

"When she speaks with world leaders, the world is going to listen," said David Wilkins, a former ambassador to Canada under President George W. Bush and Speaker of the South Carolina House. "Everything she says will be heard and digested."

Haley was lauded this week as someone well-prepared to bring people together over difficult issues, though not someone well-versed in the nuances of foreign policy.

"It's a surprising pick to have someone who doesn't have the diplomatic experience required," said Ted Piccone, senior fellow in foreign policy at the Brookings Institution. But, he added, there's an opportunity "if the administration wants to look at the United Nations as a place where deals can be done".

Her supporters thought Haley's lack of diplomatic expertise would not be a hindrance. "I think talented people can do anything," said Senator Lindsey Graham.

Haley will arrive at a United Nations dealing with a world simmering with tension in a myriad of flashpoints. Current UN Ambassador Samantha Power's experience illustrates the sort of promise and problems Haley faces.

The key to US leverage is in the 15-member Security Council. Any of its five permanent members - the US, China, Russia, the United Kingdom and France - have a veto. Trump's had harsh words for China, while stressing more cooperation with Russia.

Be careful, warned Senator Ben Cardin, a Senate Foreign Relations Committee member. "Russia has shown itself to be a global bully and not a partner," Cardin said.

Power, who has an extensive background in international affairs, has been one of the Obama administration's key people watching implementation of the Iran nuclear pact.

She was also instrumental earlier this year in getting the Security Council to unanimously impose new sanctions intended to stop North Korea from further developing weapons of mass destruction. Power has been less successful, though, combating Russian resistance to agreeing on how to curb Syria's civil war.

Piccone, a senior foreign policy adviser in the Clinton administration, thought Haley could have an opening. "Trump has said we need to fix Syria," he said. He noted that Antonio Guterres, secretary general-designate, has a political background. He had been prime minister of Portugal.

Ann Corkery, a former delegate to the UN General Assembly, said Haley's political experience could be highly useful. "She has consistently demonstrated her ability to bring together people on opposing sides of complicated issues," said Corkery, now a Washington attorney.

The news of Haley's selection came after days of criticism of Trump's early picks as a homogeneous bloc of older, white men. If confirmed, Haley would step down as governor and be replaced by the state's lieutenant governor, Henry McMaster, who was an early and vocal supporter of Trump.

Haley, 44, supported Florida senator Marco Rubio during the Republican primaries, and she was a prominent and frequent critic of Trump early in his run.

That criticism was thought to have kept her off Trump's list of vice-presidential candidates, although her name was mentioned in passing before he chose Indiana governor Mike Pence.

Haley called out Trump in January when she gave the official Republican rebuttal to President Barack Obama's State of the Union address, and she later took him to task for his failure to condemn groups like the Ku Klux Klan.

"Some people think that you have to be the loudest voice in the room to make a difference," Haley said in the State of the Union rebuttal. "That is just not true. Often, the best thing we can do is turn down the volume."

In a follow-up interview on the NBC's *Today* show, Haley – the daughter of immigrants from India – said: "Mr Trump has definitely contributed to what I think is just irresponsible talk".

Trump responded harshly to that address, calling her "weak" on immigration and noting that she had asked him for campaign contributions.

"She's very, very weak on illegal immigration," Trump said. "She's very, very weak on illegal immigration. You can't have that."

The following month, she condemned Trump for not speaking out against white supremacy more forcefully.

Among the challenges Haley faces:

Will Trump renegotiate last year's Iran nuclear deal, reached between that country and the US and five other world powers?

Haley opposed the pact. The UN has urged all of the agreement's negotiators to continue honouring it, something all other parties have signalled they intend to do. Supporters say scrapping the agreement will help Iranian hard-liners, whose interests are better served with a more isolated Islamic Republic.

Will Trump stick to his campaign promise to halt Muslim migration to the US until terrorist threats are addressed? Will he bar refugees fleeing violence in countries like Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan?

Such policy could violate international law, which stipulates that other countries have an obligation to take in people seeking refuge from persecution in their home country and cannot bar refugees based on origin.

Guterres is likely to resist any American efforts to dismantle refugee programs. He formerly served as the UN High Commissioner for Refugees and is a strong advocate for wealthy countries doing their fair share to help the most vulnerable. He will take office January 1.

Will Trump have much use for the UN? He's not a fan of traditional alliances.

During the campaign, Trump branded NATO, the 67-year-old European defense pact, as obsolete. He said the United States backing of a NATO ally could depend on whether a nation paid its fair share of military spending. About 70 percent of NATO spending comes from the US.

Trump appeared to soften that view last week. A NATO statement said he and Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg discussed the alliance's "enduring importance." Trump has also suggested that Japan, South Korea and Germany don't pay enough for US military protection.

Will Trump bring back waterboarding as an interrogation tool, even though it's a violation of the international convention on torture?

The UN Commissioner for Human Rights has already warned his staff that they will fight attempts from a Trump administration to bend current human rights norms. Trump this week told *The New York Times* his view of torture may be shifting.

He said that retired General James N. Mattis, who headed the United States Central Command, told him "I've never found it to be useful."

