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Could vice-president Mike Pence be the most powerful man in America?

Donald Trump's link to the Republican establishment finds himself in a strong position, and has already gained ground

Patrick Allitt



19 November 2016 9:00 AM

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Let's take stock. Donald Trump, until last week, had never done a government job or held an elected office. He ran for



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In last week's jostling for power, he clearly came out ahead of Chris Christie, the governor of New Jersey. Trump almost selected Christie as his running mate back in July, before settling for Pence. He gave Christie the consolation prize of organising the transition, at a time when hardly anyone thought there would *be* a transition. Now that the impossible has happened, Trump has taken the suddenly significant job out of Christie's hands and given it to Pence.

Trump may well believe, along with nearly everyone, that Christie was to blame for 'Bridgegate', the deliberate creation of paralysing traffic jams on one of the major bridges from New Jersey to New York to punish a Democratic town mayor convicted and may go to jail.

Pence, by contrast, has an untarnished personal record and is now in a position to shape the Trump administration by pushing his preferred candidates into key positions. He's also low-key, patient, and a reconciler. For example, Trump has had a succession of rows with Paul Ryan, speaker of the House of Representatives. Each insulted the other during the campaign. Pence gets on well with both men, is already their go-between, and might become the peacemaker. He was a member of the House of Representatives for 12 years up to 2012, then governor of his home state, Indiana, for another four. He has worked with most of the leading Republicans, and has a reputation among them for hard work and ideological purity.

At a time when rumours abound that Trump is planning a hands-off presidency — it's said he will spend a good amount of time in New York — an intriguing question presents itself: how much else will be devolved to Pence? Might his duties include running the American government?

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Pence was born in 1959 in the Indiana town of Columbus, population 45,000, graduated from a small religious college, attended law school and made his name as a conservative radio commentator, once describing himself as 'Rush Limbaugh on decaf'. Catholic by birth, with Irish ancestors, he became a born-again Christian in his teens, claiming that evangelical Protestantism gave him, for the first time, the chance to develop a personal relationship with Jesus. He has promised never to drink alcohol unless his wife was in the room, and apparently has stuck to the pledge. He finds the theory of evolution unconvincing and doubts the human role in global warming. He favours balanced budgets and a strong defence posture while opposing abortion, gay rights and sex education. He supported an Indiana law that would have let business owners deny service to gay people, but was forced to back away from it under intense local and national pressure.

His office, the vice-presidency, has been a mixed bag historically. Often a place where presidents have mothballed prominent rivals, it remains nevertheless — as the cliché goes — just a heartbeat from the presidency. Eight presidents have died in office, pushing eight vice-presidents into the Oval Office. Six other former veeps have advanced to the top job, sometimes in subsequent elections but once (Gerald Ford, 1974) when a sitting president had to resign. Even if the president survives but is weak or inexperienced, the right vice-president can play an influential role.

The US constitution says nothing about the work the vice-president should do, other than to break deadlocked votes in the Senate and to preside over the quadrennial work of the electoral college. In the early days of the republic, the president was the man with the most votes, and the vice-president the man with the second most. George Washington's vice-president, John Adams, found he had nothing to do, and complained in a letter to his wife that he held 'the most



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The unspoken, but doubtless not un-thought, reality for Pence is that Trump has two immense weaknesses. First is his lack of experience. It's one thing to claim that only a new broom can sweep clean but it's another to show up, green and credulous, in a city full of tough janitors. The new president is going to need a lot of help. Second, Trump is an old man, already 70, and likely to decline in energy as the years pass. It may not be long before Pence, 13 years his junior, comes to seem like the dynamic half of Washington's strange new duo.

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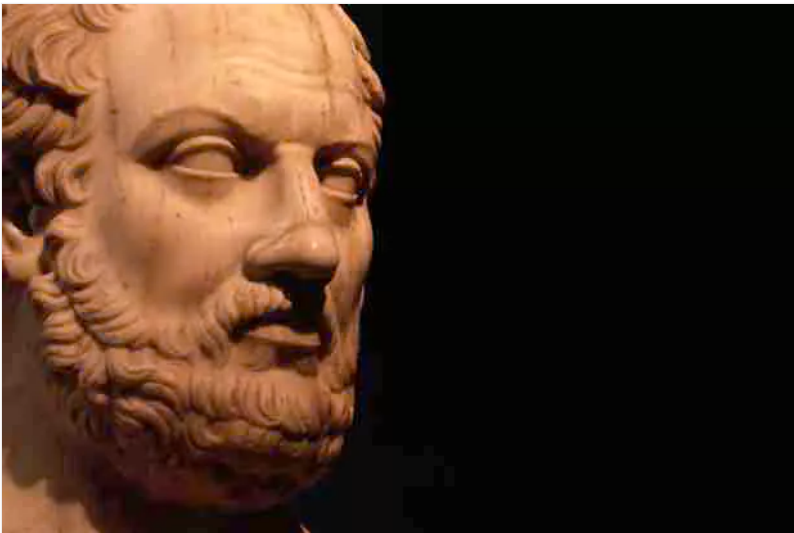
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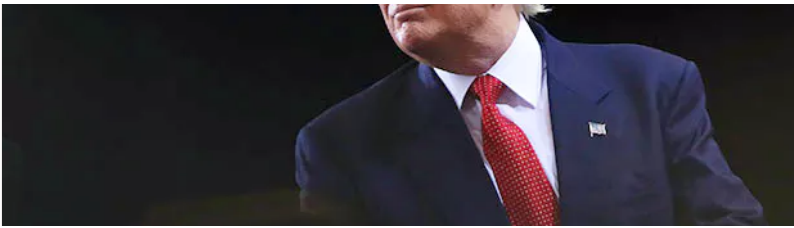


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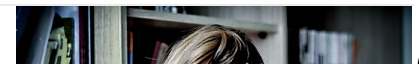
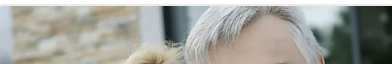
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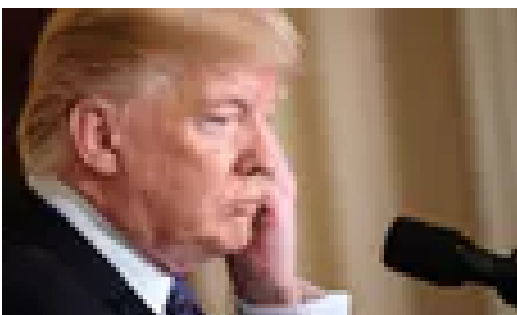
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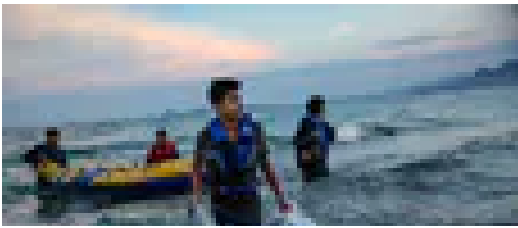


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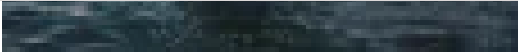


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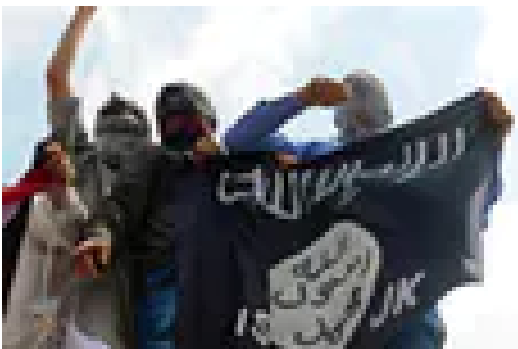
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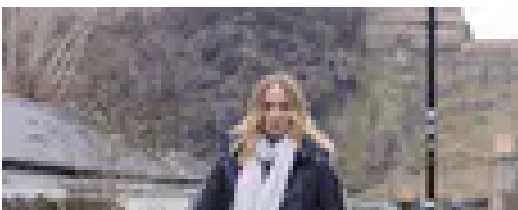
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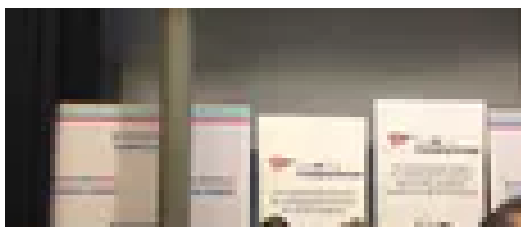


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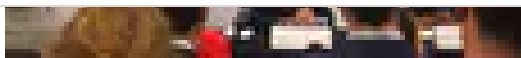
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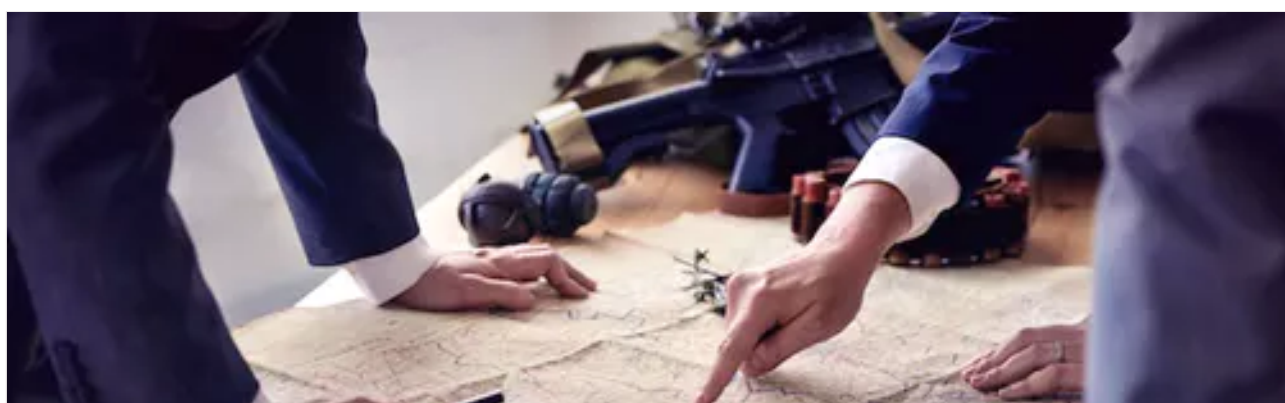
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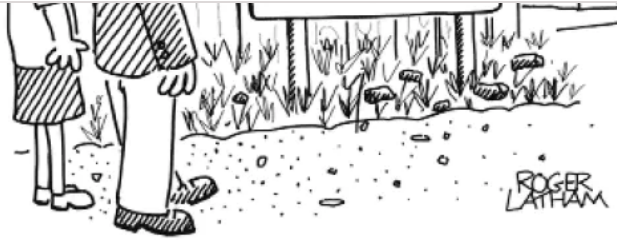
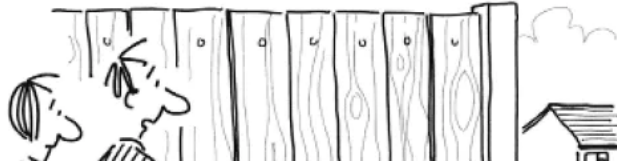


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