

Bolton's appointment: Another warning of new US wars

By Peter Symonds
24 March 2018

The appointment of the notorious warmonger John Bolton as Trump's national security adviser on Thursday is a clear sign that the White House is being put on a war footing. Bolton is well known for his advocacy of illegal wars of aggression, in particular against North Korea and Iran, his contempt for the UN and international law, and his belligerent stance towards US rivals such as China and Russia.

North Korea is immediately within Trump's crosshairs. The president indicated earlier this month that he would meet with North Korean leader Kim Jong-un in May. However, the installation of Bolton in place of H.R. McMaster and the hawkish Mike Pompeo as US secretary of state in place of Rex Tillerson two weeks ago demonstrates that the purpose of any meeting will not be to negotiate, but to deliver a US ultimatum or stage a provocation.

Bolton is an open advocate of pre-emptive military attacks on North Korea on the pretext of ending the so-called military threat posed by its nuclear arsenal. Just last month, he seized on Pompeo's remark that North Korea was "a handful of months" from having a nuclear missile capable of reaching the US, to set out a sham legal case in the *Wall Street Journal* for attacking North Korea. "We should not wait until the last minute," he emphasised.

In another *Wall Street Journal* comment last August, Bolton scathingly dismissed any prospect of a deal with North Korea and declared that "some sort of strike is likely unavoidable unless China agrees to regime change in Pyongyang." While well aware of the huge casualties that such a war would bring to South Korea and Japan, he nevertheless insisted that the US had no option but to carry out pre-emptive strikes on North Korea and set out several strategies up to and including a full-scale air war and invasion.

Bolton is a bitter critic of the 2015 nuclear deal with Iran done under the Obama administration that placed severe limitations on that country's nuclear programs, and is thus in tune with Trump's threat to withdraw from the agreement in May if it is not drastically changed. In a bellicose comment in 2015 in the *New York Times* entitled "To stop Iran's bomb, bomb Iran," he advocated US military strikes combined with a concerted effort for regime change in Tehran.

Likewise Bolton is a strident advocate of a confrontational approach to China, pushing for far stronger action to challenge Chinese maritime claims in the South China and East China Seas. His views on Taiwan are in line with the Trump administration's questioning of the "One China policy" and steps towards forging closer ties with Taiwan—moves that would gravely undermine relations between the US and China and greatly heighten the danger of conflict.

Writing in the *Wall Street Journal* in 2016, Bolton called on the US to play the "Taiwan card" by upgrading official ties with the island that China regards as an integral part of its territory. "For a new US president willing to act boldly, there are opportunities to halt and then reverse China's seemingly inexorable march toward hegemony in East Asia," he wrote.

The appointment of Bolton has provoked alarm in sections of the American political establishment and media. Democratic Senator Bob Menendez declared that while Trump might view Bolton as a sympathetic sycophant, "I would remind him that Mr Bolton has a reckless approach to advancing the safety and security of Americans—far outside any political party."

Richard Painter, a former White House lawyer under President George Bush, described Bolton as "by far the most dangerous man" of that administration. "Hiring

him as the president's top national security adviser is an invitation to war, perhaps nuclear war. This must be stopped at all costs," he told the *Guardian*.

In its editorial yesterday "Yes, John Bolton really is that dangerous," the *New York Times* warned: "There are few people more likely than Mr Bolton is to lead the country into war ... Coupled with his nomination of the hard-line CIA director, Mike Pompeo, as secretary of state, Mr Trump is indulging his worst nationalist instincts. Mr Bolton, in particular, believes the United States can do what it wants without regard to international law, treaties or the political commitments of previous administrations."

While it is certainly true that Bolton is an infamous advocate of criminal wars, such criticisms and warnings ring completely hollow. There is no anti-war faction of the American ruling class as the past quarter century of US invasions and interventions demonstrates. Rather the bitter political infighting and crisis in Washington revolves around how best to use US military might to shore up its position in the geopolitical order and which rival or rivals to attack first.

Significantly, the *New York Times* editorial cites Bolton's attitude to Russia as his one saving grace. "Mr Bolton's position on Russia," it declares, "that NATO must have a strong response to the Kremlin-linked poisoning of a former Russian spy in Britain is somewhat better than Mr Trump's." This remark reflects the right-wing campaign waged by the newspaper in league with the Democrats and sections of the military-intelligence apparatus to remove Trump over his alleged collusion with Russian officials during the 2016 presidential election campaign. This is nothing less than a push for confrontation and war with Russia.

Bolton, in fact, has a militarist response to any challenge posed to US imperialist interests—China and Russia alike. In a series of tweets over the past month, he has called for the US to strengthen its allies in Central and Eastern Europe against alleged Russian cyber war; a strategic response to new Russian nuclear missiles to show "we will not let Russia push the US and its allies around;" and "a long term strategy to deal with countries like Russia and China with longstanding rulers."

Bolton's appointment as Trump's national security

adviser does not require congressional confirmation. The only way to block his installation would be through a broad campaign which the Democrats and other critics are not about to initiate as it would mean alerting the public about the danger of war and risk triggering an anti-war movement that would rapidly go beyond their control.

Bolton was one of the gang of war criminals in the Bush administration that invented and promoted the lies about Iraq's non-existent weapons of mass destruction that were used as the pretext for the brutal US-led invasion and occupation. Neither Bolton nor anyone else was prosecuted under the Obama administration, which intensified the drive to war against Russia and China. As a result, Trump is able to install Bolton as his administration prepares for even more disastrous wars.

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