

John Bolton, the world's hope

The belligerent national security adviser has a historic opportunity to stick it to his critics



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JOHN BOLTON is not well-liked in Washington. A warmonger and bully, the national security adviser is disdainful of the bipartisan foreign-policy world and the governing institutions its members cycle in and out of. That he oversees one of them is typical of the plate-smashing Trump administration. Yet few doubt that Mr Bolton is a wily operator. As President Donald Trump's third national security adviser—and the first with previous experience of civilian bureaucracy—he has already demonstrated his mastery of the inter-agency policy process. His role in derailing, at least temporarily, Mr Trump's planned meeting with Kim Jong Un in Singapore therefore demands scrutiny.

Mr Bolton suggested the “Libya model” was what America wanted from North Korea. That was not illogical. Mr Trump had demanded Mr Kim take the same step as Muammar Qaddafi in 2003: denuclearisation in return for sanctions relief. Yet the fact that Qaddafi was later bombed from power by a NATO intervention, dragged from his hiding place by insurgents, sodomised with a bayonet and shot dead, made Mr Bolton's choice of precedent complicated. The Libya model is what Mr Kim fears most. It is prime evidence for the theory that has underpinned his regime's nuclear programme, to the North Korean people's cost, for five

decades: possession of nuclear weapons equals regime survival; disarmament equals regime endangerment.

The North Korean smackdown to Mr Bolton (“We do not hide our feelings of repugnance towards him”) was predictable. But then Mr Trump blundered in. Wrongly assuming Mr Bolton had referred to the American-led bombing of Libya, not to the disarmament that preceded it, he said it didn’t sound like what he had in mind for Mr Kim. But then he added that, yes, now you come to mention it, if the North Korean despot wouldn’t make a deal in Singapore, his regime would “most likely” have to be “decimated”. When Mike Pence parroted that threat, the North Koreans called the vice-president “ignorant and stupid” and threatened a nuclear war. Mr Bolton went to see Mr Trump about that. The president called off the summit soon after. Mr Bolton, who doubts it is worth negotiating with Mr Kim and has long advocated toppling his regime, may not be displeased with that outcome.

At the least, he clearly intended to add a harder edge to Mr Trump’s newfound enthusiasm for the “honourable” Mr Kim. In the absence of many other moderating influences on Mr Trump—whose confidence in his ability to direct global affairs appears to be growing by the day—this suggests Mr Bolton could play a more positive role than his many critics have countenanced. They fear he may lead Mr Trump into a catastrophic conflict, a valid concern. Yet it seems likelier Mr Bolton’s scepticism about diplomacy, apparent good standing with the president and willingness to speak truth to power could mitigate a more pressing risk: that the president will expend a rare moment of American leverage with Mr Kim on a hasty, ill-considered deal that could leave East Asia even more insecure than it is now. “There’s a synergy between Trump’s desire for a deal and Bolton’s ideological prejudices,” notes Jeffrey Bader, an East Asia guru and former diplomat.

This apparent turnaround in Mr Bolton’s role reflects a more dramatic change in Mr Trump. The president spent much of last year threatening Mr Kim with “fire and fury”. By demanding an array of military options against North Korea, he also suggested he was in earnest. His appointment of the bellicose Mr Bolton, to replace H.R. McMaster, reinforced that impression. And if this scared the Washington crowd, it appears to have terrified Mr Kim, as well as China and South Korea, both of which fear a war on the peninsula more than they fear North Korea’s nuclear arsenal. With their support, Mr Trump imposed the toughest sanctions regime on North Korea in over a decade, a substantial achievement. Yet the alacrity with which he has since melted in the face of Mr Kim’s request for talks has made his war talk seem less credible. Arguably, it has exposed Mr Trump as the actor-politician—with a penchant for talking tough, a lifelong aversion to costly wars and no fixed purpose beyond concern for his own interests—that he always was. It is hard to see the sanctions regime surviving that realisation intact; China and South Korea are already itching to restore their economic ties to North Korea. This may help explain why Mr Trump, notwithstanding the Bolton-instigated hiatus, seems keener for a deal with Mr Kim than ever.

It also underlines another misconception about Mr Trump’s foreign policy. Relentless media attention to his team, including Mr Bolton, is based on an assumption that he would be more easily influenced than he has turned out to be. The president likes to hear diverse opinions—hence his desire for a fire-eater like Mr Bolton, a type of adviser he lacked. But he has made

the big foreign-policy calls himself, often, as in his swift acceptance of Mr Kim's invitation, on his own initiative and in the high-rolling way he ran his business. This is why it seems likely that the summit with Mr Kim will be revived and that some sort of deal, or semblance of a deal, will result: Mr Trump wants that. In turn, this is why Mr Bolton's ideological obduracy looks less risky than welcome.

Bolton braces

The deal, if it comes, is unlikely to contain much detail. The task of filling in the gaps—on how Mr Kim's commitment to a phased denuclearisation might be verified, for example, or on whether his short-range missiles could be included in it—would fall to Mike Pompeo, the secretary of state, and Mr Bolton. It would be a perilous undertaking, requiring them to deal not only with North Korea, but also with Mr Trump's desire to be seen to have delivered world peace. And a suspicion that Mr Pompeo is unduly keen to stay tight with the president suggests only Mr Bolton might be up to it. For such a Washington bogeyman to play that heroic role would be extraordinary. Then again, who could have predicted Mr Trump negotiating with Mr Kim?

<http://foreignpolicy.com/2018/03/23/john-bolton-is-a-national-security-threat/>

John Bolton Is a National Security Threat

John Bolton wants regime change in North Korea and Iran, and he'll do whatever it takes to get it.

BY COLIN KAHL, JON WOLFSTHAL
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Lt. Gen. H.R. McMaster is out as Trump's national security advisor, and former U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations (and current Fox News contributor) John Bolton is in. This is no mere rotation of on-screen personalities in the latest episode of "The Trump Show." It is a move with potentially profound implications for the direction of U.S. foreign policy. Indeed, Bolton's ascendance increases the risk of not one but two wars — with North Korea and Iran.

McMaster was no dove. But Bolton falls into an entirely different category of dangerous uber-hawk. Fifteen years ago, Bolton championed the Iraq War, and, to this day, he **continues** to believe the most disastrous foreign-policy decision in a generation was a good idea. Bolton's position on Iraq was no anomaly. Shortly before the 2003 invasion, he reportedly **told** Israeli officials that once Saddam Hussein was deposed, it would be necessary to deal with Syria, Iran, and North Korea. He has essentially maintained this position ever since. Put plainly: For Bolton, there are few international problems where war is not the answer.

As the nuclear crisis with North Korea enters a critical period, Trump's choice of Bolton as national security advisor dims the prospect of reaching a peaceful solution. Bolton, **like** McMaster, sees Kim Jong Un as fundamentally irrational and undeterrable — a view that seems to justify launching a preventive war if North Korea refuses to denuclearize. But McMaster supported diplomacy and, as a military man with extensive combat experience, understood the costs of war. Bolton, on the other hand, has spent his entire career sabotaging diplomacy with Pyongyang and seems downright giddy about a possible military confrontation.

A little history is helpful here. Bolton was undersecretary of state for arms control and international security when President George W. Bush's administration made the fateful decision in 2002 to kill the 1994 Agreed Framework with North Korea. The Bill Clinton-era accord froze North Korea's plutonium program under effective verification. But when it was discovered that Pyongyang was pursuing a separate uranium enrichment program with the help of Pakistan, a key decision had to be made: re-engage in diplomacy to expand the agreement to prohibit uranium enrichment or tear it up, isolate a member of the "Axis of Evil," and push for regime change. Bush, guided in part by Bolton, chose the latter approach. And once the Agreed Framework collapsed, North Korea took the secured plutonium under its control and built about half a dozen additional nuclear weapons, testing its first in 2006. For many arms control and nonproliferation experts, this case represents a cautionary tale about the risks of foreclosing diplomatic engagement. In Bolton's mind, however, North Korea's actions simply prove that diplomacy doesn't work with rogue states and that the only solution is to end these regimes all together, through U.S. military might if necessary.

More than a decade later, Bolton continues to cling to this dark worldview. In a Sept. 3, 2017, Fox News [interview](#), Bolton declared that the only option left to address the North Korean nuclear challenge is “to end the regime in North Korea” and strike first. “Anybody who thinks that more diplomacy with North Korea, more sanctions, whether against North Korea or an effort to apply sanctions against China, is just giving North Korea more time to increase its nuclear arsenal,” Bolton warned. “We have fooled around with North Korea for 25 years, and fooling around some more is just going to make matters worse.”

In an echo of the rationale that drove the United States to topple Saddam’s regime, Bolton painted an apocalyptic picture of the gathering danger posed by Kim’s nuclear and ballistic missile programs. The North Koreans “are very close to being able to hit targets all across the United States ... with thermonuclear weapons,” Bolton said. “Moreover, this regime will sell anything to anybody for hard currency. They could sell these weapons, ballistic missiles and the nuclear devices themselves, to Iran in a heartbeat.... The metaphor of the Axis of Evil is not really a metaphor — it is a reality. North Korea can sell these devices to terrorist groups around the world. They can be used as electromagnetic pulse weapons ... destroying our electrical grid’s capabilities. They can be used for nuclear blackmail.” If we fail to act, “it would be a lesson to every would-be nuclear state in the world that if you just have patience enough, you can wear the United States down.” Instead, “we should heed Franklin Roosevelt’s advice.... When you see a rattlesnake poised to strike, you don’t wait until it has struck before you crush it.... I would argue that today North Korean nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles, and Iran’s while we’re on the subject, are the rattlesnakes of the 21st century.”

To further lay the groundwork for taking military action, Bolton penned an [op-ed](#) in the Wall Street Journal just last month titled “The Legal Case for Striking North Korea First.” Recalling the Bush administration’s flawed analysis in the run-up to the Iraq War, Bolton argued that “the threat is imminent” and that the United States has every right to take launch a preventive war before it is too late.

On March 8, Trump shocked the world by agreeing to meet with Kim sometime before the end of May. The president’s decision represents a high-stakes gamble that could produce a diplomatic breakthrough — or send the United States and North Korea careening toward a war that could kill hundreds of thousands of people. Reports [suggest](#) that the timing of Trump’s move to replace McMaster with Bolton, as well as the president’s earlier decision to fire Secretary of State Rex Tillerson and replace him with Mike Pompeo, is an effort to put key personnel aligned with his views in place leading into the summit. Yet if Bolton reflects, or influences, Trump’s position on North Korea, the entire endeavor is doomed. Indeed, Bolton reacted to news of the summit by dismissing any prospect for success and rooting for a quick failure so the United States can move on to other options. According to Bolton, the [only](#) value in having this “unproductive” leader-to-leader meeting now, instead of starting with a more deliberate set of working-level talks, is to “foreshorten the amount of time that we’re going to waste in negotiations that will never produce the result we want, which is Kim giving up his nuclear program.”

Bolton’s doomsaying views are not reserved for North Korea alone; he is equally likely to encourage Trump to chart a path toward military confrontation with Iran. McMaster was no fan of Iran. As an Iraq War veteran who lost troops to Iranian-made rockets and roadside bombs, he favored a muscular policy to push back against the Islamic Republic’s regional ambitions. But McMaster did not favor ditching the 2015 Iran nuclear deal (officially, the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, or JCPOA) because he understood that doing so would isolate Washington, not Tehran, and make it even harder to contain Iran’s other destabilizing behavior. Not so with Bolton.

Over the past two years, inspectors with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) have filed nine consecutive reports showing that Iran is living up to its commitments to constrain its nuclear program in accordance with the JCPOA. Yet Bolton [claims](#), “I don’t think the evidence is there that this agreement is slowing them down.” Bolton has also repeatedly asserted, without any actual evidence, that Iran is on the cusp of acquiring off-the-shelf nuclear weapons from North Korea. “If Tehran’s long collusion with Pyongyang on ballistic missiles is even partly mirrored in the nuclear field,” he [wrote](#) last year in the Wall Street Journal, “the Iranian threat is nearly as imminent as North Korea’s. Whatever the extent of their collaboration thus far, Iran could undoubtedly use its now-unfrozen assets and cash from oil-investment deals to buy nuclear hardware from North Korea, one of the world’s poorest nations.” Moreover, for Bolton, actual Iranian compliance with the JCPOA seems beside the point. As he [wrote](#) on Twitter in January: “There’s been far too much debate over whether #Iran is in violation of the #NuclearDeal. The point is that this was a bad deal to begin with and it’s a bad deal now and it should be torn up.”

As is the case with North Korea, Bolton’s appointment comes at an incredibly sensitive time for the Iran nuclear deal. In fact, the fate of the JCPOA will likely be decided in May — the same month as the proposed Trump-Kim summit. On Jan. 12, Trump [set](#) a 120-day deadline for European allies and Congress to “fix” the agreement, or he would stop waiving U.S. nuclear-related sanctions and withdraw from the deal. McMaster — along with Tillerson and Secretary of Defense James Mattis — repeatedly urged Trump not to trash the JCPOA, searching for a minimally sufficient agreement with Europe and U.S. lawmakers to keep the president in the deal. A State Department team has been [working](#) with their counterparts in France, Germany, and the United Kingdom to identify a compromise that would entail additional European commitments to sanction Iran’s ballistic missile program, a reaffirmation of IAEA inspection rights, and a framework to negotiate additional restrictions on Iran’s nuclear program when constraints on uranium enrichment weaken at years 10 and 15 of the JCPOA in exchange for Trump remaining in the accord. Bolton — perhaps with [support](#) from fellow Iran hawk Pompeo — is likely to tell the State Department not to bother and encourage the president to reject any arrangement with the Europeans as insufficient.

Last August, Bolton wrote a [memo](#) to Trump, published in the National Review, dismissing the notion that the JCPOA can or should be fixed, instead outlining a strategy for ripping up the deal. And when asked by Fox Business on Oct. 4, 2017, what advice he would give Trump, Bolton [said](#): “I would urge him to get out of the Iran deal completely.... We shouldn’t try a too-cute-by-half approach [of seeking to improve the deal]. America benefits from strong, clear, decisive leadership. This is a very bad deal for the United States. That’s what the president believes. He should just get out of it.”

This month, Gen. Joseph Votel, the top U.S. military officer in the Middle East, **said** that “the JCPOA addresses one of the principle threats that we deal with from Iran, so if the JCPOA goes away, then we will have to have another way” to address Iran’s nuclear program. There is no doubt what Bolton envisions as the alternative: As he **argued** in an infamous 2015 New York Times op-ed, and has repeatedly advocated over the years, “to stop Iran’s bomb, bomb Iran” and push for regime change. Bolton has been completely transparent about his game plan here.

In October 2017, Bolton **outlined** the steps he would recommend to the president following a U.S. exit from the nuclear deal: “I think you put more American sanctions on them for their nuclear and ballistic missile program. You investigate more carefully the highly likely level of cooperation with North Korea. We know they’re cooperating on missiles — almost certainly they are on nuclear weapons as well. You go to the Europeans and say, ‘We understand this is going to cause you some difficulty, but you need to join with us.’ And we see what we can do, including talking to Israel about possible military steps.” Unsurprisingly, Bolton’s ultimate goal toward Iran — like it was with Saddam’s Iraq and is with Kim’s North Korea — is regime change. As he argued in yet another Wall Street Journal **piece**, “America’s declared policy should be ending Iran’s 1979 Islamic Revolution before its 40th anniversary.”

Bolton’s views on Iraq, North Korea, Iran, and other issues reveal a general pattern of thought: a tendency toward worst-case thinking; a pattern of warping and **misusing** intelligence to build the case for war with rogue states; a disdain for allies and **multilateral institutions**; a blind faith in U.S. military power and the benefits of regime change; and a tendency to see the ends as justifying the means, however horrific. Bolton also has a long and **documented history** of stifling views that differ from his own and even punishing subordinates who disagree with him. While this style may make him a good fit with Trump, it will compound the ongoing demoralization of the intelligence community, career civil servants, and National Security Council staff and **contribute** to the further dysfunction of an already broken national security process.

McMaster’s departure and Bolton’s appointment represent just the latest sign that Trump is sick of being constrained by the “adults” in the room. Instead, the president seems increasingly inclined to go with his gut and is looking to surround himself with ideological bedfellows and enablers. And, in Bolton, Trump has found a national security advisor who will feed his worst instincts: his uncomfortable relationship with objective facts; his belief that a bullying maximalism is how the United States “leads”; his disdain for real diplomacy; his tendency to value the military instrument above — and to the exclusion of — all others; and his conviction that a toxic work environment and ridicule produce good outcomes. In government, personnel often is policy — and Trump’s latest personnel move is likely to leave the United States and the world less safe.

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<http://foreignpolicy.com/2018/03/23/give-john-bolton-a-chance/>

Give John Bolton a Chance

If you squint at Trump’s new national security advisor, you might see some silver linings.

BY PETER FEAVER

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What is the most optimistic take one can offer on President Donald Trump’s decision to replace H.R. McMaster with John Bolton, a former official in George W. Bush’s State Department?

That is the task I assigned to myself, and it is a daunting one. The prevailing reaction I have seen has been sharply negative, both in the private messages I have been receiving and the public commentary dominating the media coverage.

The conventional view is that this move:

- Intensifies the chaos within the White House by bringing in a famously sharp-elbowed bureaucratic warrior who is unlikely to get along with his counterparts (or perhaps even his boss);
- Underscores Trump’s difficulty in recruiting and retaining top talent;
- Confirms a recent trend of replacing mainstream figures who were trusted and respected abroad with ideologues who are better known for staking out extreme positions on cable TV (i.e., Gary Cohn giving way to Larry Kudlow);
- Tilts the administration in a sharply hawkish direction, raising the specter of multiple armed conflicts in the Middle East (Iran), Asia (North Korea and possibly China), and Europe (Russia).

The conventional view is not crazy, and I would not bet against it. Still, as a congenital contrarian, I am left wondering if the conventional view is not missing any silver linings. I squinted and found a few. Not enough to break out the champagne but perhaps enough to delay heading for the bomb shelter. You be the judge:

Trump tried to fire McMaster in a less humiliating way than he did Rex Tillerson and Reince Priebus. This time, Trump followed the customary procedure of a private notice followed by paired, gracious statements by the firer and the firee. The treatment of McMaster over the past year was still fairly shabby overall, but the endgame could have been worse. I recognize this is like commenting on the quality of the popcorn at the Ford's Theatre concession stand in April 1865 but perhaps worth mentioning anyway.

McMaster's effectiveness was compromised and vanishing quickly regardless — the status quo was not an National Security Council that was firing on all cylinders but one that was sputtering and perhaps heading toward a full breakdown. On balance and grading on the Trump curve, McMaster was pretty effective as national security advisor. He restored morale on the NSC staff, no mean feat given the dire situation when he took over. His greatest accomplishment — shepherding a serious review of the Afghanistan conflict that ended up with the right answer despite the president's strong predilection to choose the wrong answer — is even more impressive in hindsight, given how mercurial the president has been. His team produced a solid National Security Strategy in record time, one that together with the new National Defense Strategy might have produced more order on the margins. And he helped avert other mistakes, such as blowing up the Iran nuclear deal without a plan for replacing it. But in recent weeks, the death watch around McMaster had become suffocating and the once-hidden interagency struggles too prominent. McMaster had lost the confidence of his boss and his counterparts and, as a result, would not be able to do his job adequately if he stayed much longer in office.

Bolton is not incompetent, and his first name is not general. Every administration has individuals who are promoted above their competence, but Trump's team has had more than its fair share. In the first few months, the preoccupying problem in the Trump administration was how to navigate the decision-making process with a gang that could not shoot straight. Even most of Bolton's critics concede that he was effective in navigating the bureaucracy. Perhaps more importantly, he is a civilian. Trump has been too quick to reach for the "man on horseback" to ride to the rescue to fix a personnel problem. Many of those choices — McMaster, John Kelly, and above all, James Mattis — have been good ones that I have supported. But with each new *reductio ad militaris*, Trump was politicizing the military and complicating the bedrock principle of civilian control. Bolton is very much in the pattern of a civilian determined to assert civilian control over the military. This augurs for a great deal more civil-military friction in the coming months — not unlike what was experienced in the Barack Obama, Bush, and Bill Clinton administrations. So we should not kid ourselves that a "man in civvies" is an unmitigated blessing as a replacement for a "man on horseback." But it is a step back toward what might be called "regular order" in civil-military relations rather than "abnormal order."

Bolton does not want to destroy the U.S.-led international order. Bolton is on the hawkish end of mainstream views. One can find more hawkish voices far from the corridors of power but probably not within them. However, unlike the Steve Bannon wing of the Trump coalition, Bolton does not want to destroy the system created by U.S. leaders in the wake of World War II and then reinvigorated in the wake of the Cold War. The Bannon wing had an apocalyptic view that was exponentially more dangerous — something closer to hawkishness on heroin, rather than hawkishness on steroids.

Bolton's hawkishness on North Korea is a strategic concern in the long run but could be a tactical advantage in the short run. As every critic has noted, Bolton has famously advocated for preventive war against North Korea. Clearly, making him national security advisor increases the risks of war on the peninsula. But in the short run, it probably neutralizes the near-term threat raised by Trump's surprise announcement that he would concede to North Korea's long-cherished desire for a face-to-face sit-down with a U.S. president without having to give up anything in return. Bolton's greatest strength is as a ferocious arms control negotiator, and this balances Trump's great weakness in this same area. If there is a diplomatic solution to North Korea's nuclear problem — a big "if" — then it is more likely to be found with Bolton's bad cop paired with Trump's good cop. Of course, if there is no such diplomatic solution to be found, this team is likely to discover that fact sooner than other possible pairings. That is a sobering thought.

Bolton corrects even more markedly for Trump's unnerving posture of appeasement toward Putin. Bolton's hawkishness extends to Russia, further consolidating the position within the Trump administration of those who recognize that Putin has been exploiting America's domestic political paralysis and setting back U.S. interests across multiple geopolitical arenas. From Putin's perspective, Bolton is probably not seen as another "useful idiot" who can be toyed with. Hopefully, Bolton can help Trump get inside his own team to create a more effective and responsible Russia policy than the one Trump has hitherto advanced.

Bolton did not have to shave his mustache. Trump famously approached personnel recruitment with an insistence that applicants "look the part." Whether Trump could ever really afford to indulge the prejudice of "lookism," I don't think he can afford to now. Hopefully, this is a harbinger that Trump will focus on more important criteria as he continues to build out the team.

Reviewing the list, I can imagine critics saying the proposed silver linings are hard to see for all the clouds. Even though I was trying to be as optimistic as possible, here's hoping, for America's sake, that I am still needlessly pessimistic.

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<http://www.breitbart.com/big-government/2018/03/23/caroline-glick-john-boltons-appointment-america-first-move/>

Caroline Glick: John Bolton's Appointment is an 'America First' Move

by CAROLINE GLICK²³ Mar 2018

President Donald Trump's decision to appoint former UN Ambassador John Bolton to serve as his National Security Advisor is arguably the most significant single step he has taken to date toward implementing his America First foreign policy since taking office.

The news hit America's enemies and competitors — from Pyongyang to Teheran to Moscow to Beijing — like a wall of bricks Thursday night.

Early criticisms on the political right of Bolton's appointment have centered on two points. First, it is argued that Bolton, who has been involved in U.S. foreign policymaking since the Reagan administration, is a creature of the Washington foreign policy swamp.

While it is true that Bolton is from Washington — or Baltimore, to be precise — and although it is true that he held senior foreign policy positions in both Bush administrations, he has always been a thorn in the side of the establishment rather than a member of that establishment.

For the better part of three decades, Bolton has bravely held positions that fly in the face of the establishment's innate preference for appeasement. He was a [vocal critic](#), for example, of then-President Bill Clinton's disastrous nuclear diplomacy with North Korea.

The 1994 ["Agreed Framework"](#) that Clinton concluded with Pyongyang was touted as a peaceful resolution of the nuclear crisis with North Korea. In exchange for shuttering — but not destroying — its nuclear installations, North Korea received light water reactors from the U.S. and massive economic relief. As Bolton warned it would, North Korea pocketed the concessions and gifts and continued to develop its nuclear weapons. In other words, far from preventing North Korea from developing nuclear weapons, the Agreed Framework preserved the North Korean nuclear program and enabled the regime to develop it effectively with U.S. assistance.

For his warnings, Bolton has been reviled as a "warmonger" and a "superhawk" by the foreign policy elite, which has gone out of its way to undercut him.

President George W. Bush appointed Bolton to serve as UN ambassador in 2005 in a recess appointment. Three moderate Republicans on the Senate Foreign Affairs Committee, Lincoln Chafee (RI), Chuck Hagel (ND), and George Voinovich (OH), [signaled](#) that they would oppose Bolton's confirmation, blocking it. At the time, rumors surfaced that then-Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice had quietly undercut Bolton's confirmation in private conversations with senators. Those rumors were denied, and Rice publicly supported Bolton's confirmation. But in 2016, Rice, along with her mentor, former secretary of state James Baker, and her deputy and successor as National Security Advisor, Stephen Hadley, [openly opposed](#) President Trump's intention to appoint Bolton Deputy Secretary of State. At the same time, all three [lobbied](#) Trump to appoint outgoing Secretary of State Rex Tillerson.

Bolton was a vocal opponent of Rice's [nuclear diplomacy](#) with North Korea, undertaken after Pyongyang conducted its first nuclear test [in 2006](#). He also opposed Rice's [pursuit](#) of diplomatic ties with Iran through negotiations in Iraq. In both cases, as events showed, Bolton's criticisms were all in place.

Rice's nuclear diplomacy with North Korea [emboldened the regime](#), and enabled its continued testing of nuclear weapons and development of ballistic missiles.

In Iran's case, Rice's [negotiations with the Iranians](#) in 2007 and 2008 set the stage for president Barack Obama's nuclear talks with Tehran, which led to the 2015 nuclear deal. That deal, like the 1994 Agreed

Framework with North Korea, preserves, rather than dismantles, Iran's nuclear program while providing Iran with the financial means to expand its regional power through its terrorist proxies. On the other hand, Bolton's actions while in office brought extraordinary benefit to US national security. For instance, as Bush's undersecretary of state for arms control and international security, in 2003 Bolton conceptualized and launched the [Proliferation Security Initiative](#) (PSI). The purpose of the PSI was to empower nations to interdict ships suspected of carrying weapons of mass destruction, delivery systems, and related materials from states and non-state actors of proliferation concern. Originally launched with 11 state members, today the PSI has 105 state members. Its members have interdicted multiple ships suspected of transferring illicit weapons systems to other states and to non-state actors. Like Trump, Bolton is an opponent of international treaties that bind the U.S. in a manner that may be antithetical to its national interests, and prefers bilateral agreements that are tailor-made to defend America's national interests. Bolton was a firm opponent of the Rome Treaty, which established the International Criminal Court. He worked avidly to vacate America's signature from the treaty. Due largely to his cogent opposition, the Bush administration decided [not to submit](#) the treaty to the Senate for ratification. Bolton concluded [100 bilateral treaties](#) with nations committing them never to present complaints against U.S. military personnel before the tribunal.

Bolton's nationalist convictions, and his refusal to join the foreign policy elite in its adoration of diplomacy, whatever the substance, over a firm, fact-based pursuit of America's national interests lies at the heart of the foreign policy establishment's opposition to him. Indeed, the level of hostility the foreign policy establishment has directed towards Bolton over the years has been so ferocious, it is a testament to his diplomatic skills, and success, that he has managed to persevere in Washington, in and out of office for forty years.

As to the second charge by conservative critics, that Bolton is a neoconservative interventionist, the fact is that he is neither a neoconservative nor is he a knee jerk interventionist. Rather, Bolton supports the judicious use of American power in the world to advance U.S. national security and economic interests when the use of force is the best way to achieve those interests.

It is true that Bolton supported the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003. But it is also true that he [opposed](#) the nation-building strategy that stood at the root of America's failure to achieve its aims there.

It is also true that like many of the neoconservatives, Bolton is a firm supporter of Israel. However, Bolton is actually far more supportive of Israel than the neoconservatives are. As a nationalist, he supports U.S. allies because he understands that the stronger America's allies are, the better able they are to defend their interests. Since American allies – particularly Israel – share America's interests, the more powerful they are, the more secure America's interests are, and the less the U.S. needs to assert its power abroad. Bolton supported – indeed, urged – Israel to destroy Iran's nuclear installations during the Obama presidency. Rather than treating Israel as what Rice referred to patronizingly as America's "[special friend](#)," Bolton views Israel as America's most powerful ally in the Middle East. He [opposes](#) Palestinian statehood and an Israeli withdrawal from the West Bank.

The neoconservative movement asserts that America's values of liberal democracy are universal, and that as a consequence, when given the opportunity to choose their leaders in open elections, everyone everywhere will choose leaders that are liberal democrats.

This view, for instance, stood at the root of Rice's demand that the Hamas terrorist group participate in the Palestinian elections in 2006. It was also the root of her decision to pressure then-Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak to permit the Muslim Brotherhood to participate in parliamentary elections in Egypt in 2005.

Since the neoconservatives asserted that all people believe in American values, they assessed that at the end of the day, even Hamas would govern responsibly. Bush [famously raised](#) what became known as the "pothole theory" of the moderating power of elected office.

Bush said, "I like the idea of people running for office. There's a positive effect when you run for office. Maybe some will run for office and say, vote for me, I look forward to blowing up America. I don't know, I don't know if that will be their platform or not. But I don't think so. I think people who generally run for office say, vote for me, I'm looking forward to fixing your potholes, or making sure you got bread on the table."

Rice heartily concurred.

Bolton, in contrast, rejected the notion that American values are universally applicable, and argued that nation building and humanitarian intervention are both antithetical to American national security interests. In other words, while he agreed with certain policies that neoconservatives also supported, he opposed the basic assumptions of the neoconservative outlook.

Bolton's **opposition** to nation-building and humanitarian interventionism was all borne out by events. As the so-called Arab Spring showed — and indeed, as Turkey's democratic transformation into an Islamic theocracy also demonstrates — American values are not universal values at all. Supporting democratic processes with no concern about the values and culture those processes empower is unwise and irresponsible, and as the rise of Islamist regimes in Gaza, Egypt, Turkey, and beyond make clear, it is also antithetical to American national security interests.

Bolton's healthy skepticism for international agreements; his support for a foreign policy that prioritizes the advancement of American national interests over multilateral diplomacy; and his belief that Obama's signature diplomatic achievement, the nuclear deal with Iran, is a disaster, all make him the senior diplomat most aligned with President Trump's America First agenda in Washington.

The combination of Trump and Bolton no doubt puts fear in the hearts of America's enemies, and heartens America's allies. Given the hatred Bolton inspires in the Washington swamp, it took great courage for Trump to appoint him. America and its allies will be the primary beneficiaries of this bold move.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/03/23/opinion/john-bolton-trump-national-security-adviser.html?action=click&pgtype=Homepage&clickSource=story-heading&module=opinion-c-col-left-region®ion=opinion-c-col-left-region&WT.nav=opinion-c-col-left-region>

Yes, John Bolton Really Is That Dangerous

By **THE EDITORIAL BOARD** MARCH 23, 2018



The good thing about John Bolton, President Trump's new national security adviser, is that he says what he thinks.

The bad thing is what he thinks.

There are few people more likely than Mr. Bolton is to lead the country into war. His selection is a decision that is as alarming as any Mr. Trump has made. His selection, along with the nomination of the hard-line C.I.A. director, Mike Pompeo, as secretary of state, shows the degree to which Mr. Trump is indulging his worst nationalistic 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.

He has argued for [attacking North Korea](#) to neutralize the threat of its nuclear weapons, which could set off a horrific war costing tens of thousands of lives. At the same time, he has disparaged diplomatic efforts, including the talks planned in late May between Mr. Trump and the North Korean leader, Kim Jong-un. He not only wants to abrogate the six-party deal that, since 2015, has significantly limited Iran's nuclear program; he has [called for bombing Iran](#) instead. He has also maligned the United Nations and other multilateral conventions, as Mr. Trump has done, favoring unilateral solutions.

Over a 30-year career in which he served three Republican presidents, including as United Nations ambassador and the State Department's top arms control official, Mr. Bolton has largely disdained diplomacy and arms control in favor of military solutions; no one worked harder to blow up the 1994 agreement under which North Korea's plutonium program was frozen for nearly eight years in exchange for heavy fuel oil and other assistance. The collapse of that agreement helped bring us to the crisis today, where North Korea is believed to have 20 or more nuclear weapons.

While Mr. Trump's [criticism of the Iraq war](#) during the campaign raised the possibility that he might take a less aggressive stance on foreign policy, no one was a more vociferous proponent of that disastrous invasion than Mr. Bolton, a position he has not renounced. At the time, Mr. Bolton said Iraqis would welcome American troops. He also said the United States' military role would be over quickly as Iraqis exercised their new freedom from Saddam Hussein and established a democracy. It was the sort of simplistic and wrongheaded position that he takes on most policies.

Mr. Bolton will replace H. R. McMaster, the three-star general who had cautioned against jettisoning the Iran nuclear deal without plans for what would come next and had other policy differences with the president. Mr. Bolton would be the third national security adviser in Mr. Trump's 14 chaotic months in office.

While General McMaster never had a smooth time in the White House, Mr. Bolton already has a relationship of sorts with Mr. Trump. He has met with the president a number of times and is a commentator on Fox News, which the president spends much of his time watching.

Mr. Bolton campaigned hard for the job, even after Mr. Trump previously rejected him for both that position and for secretary of state, in part because — seriously — the president didn't like his bushy mustache.

The national security adviser is the person who makes sure the president hears the views of all the national security agencies, including the State Department and the Defense Department, and who drives policy toward a decision. It is hard to see Mr. Bolton acting as an honest broker. He is known to play a ruthless inside game as he maneuvers to win bureaucratic battles and freezes out people he thinks have crossed him. He has been such a lightning rod that he couldn't get confirmed as United Nations ambassador in 2005, so President George W. Bush gave him a recess appointment, and he stayed in the job about a year. It was considered unlikely that the Senate would confirm him as secretary of state, but the national security adviser job doesn't require confirmation.

Bringing on the fiery Mr. Bolton now, at a delicate moment with North Korea, is a terrible decision. While Mr. Trump has often threatened North Korea with military action, he accepted Mr. Kim's invitation to a summit meeting, brokered by South Korea's president, who is eager for a diplomatic solution to the nuclear crisis.

Mr. Bolton, by contrast, told Fox News earlier this month that talks would be worthless, and he has called South Korean leaders "putty in North Korea's hands." On Feb. 28, he insisted in a [Wall Street Journal op-ed](#) article that "it is perfectly legitimate for the United States to respond to the current 'necessity' posed by North Korea's nuclear weapons by striking first." Last summer [he wrote in The Journal](#), "The U.S. should obviously seek South Korea's agreement (and Japan's) before using force, but no foreign government, even a close ally, can veto an action to protect Americans from Kim Jong Un's nuclear weapons."

On Iran, Mr. Bolton and the president are in sync, with both arguing that the United States should withdraw from the nuclear agreement by a May deadline. In March 2015, he argued in a [New York Times Op-Ed](#) opinion article that only military action like Israel's 1981 attack on Saddam Hussein's Osirak reactor in Iraq or its 2007 destruction of a Syrian reactor "can accomplish what is required."

Going to war in either of these cases would not only create unnecessary bloodshed; it would be disastrous for the United States and its allies, South Korea and Japan. The Iran deal has substantially halted the nuclear program and needs to be maintained. Negotiations between the United States and North Korea, given a new impetus by Mr. Trump and Mr. Kim, need to be tested.

Mr. Bolton's position on Russia, 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. But his rejection of a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and his endorsement of a book by the anti-Muslim activist Pam Geller are unacceptable positions for a top American official.

Mr. Bolton is certain to accelerate American alienation from its allies and the rest of the world. Congress may not be able to stop his appointment, but it should speak out against it and reassert its responsibilities under the Constitution to authorize when the nation goes to war.