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The Return of the Hawk: How John Bolton Solidifies Trump's Hard-line Foreign Policy

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In what is now a typical way to make announcements, President Trump tweeted that former Ambassador John Bolton would replace General H.R. McMaster as national security adviser, starting on April 9, 2018. McMaster's departure is on the heels of Rex Tillerson's firing, which took place on March 13, via tweet. For those of us watching this closely, McMaster's ousting is not a surprise. Reports that the president was looking to replace McMaster with someone prominent emerged two weeks ago.

Bolton is certainly well-known. But for all the wrong reasons.

Bolton's claim to fame was when he served as the U.S. ambassador to the U.N. under the George W. Bush administration. Bolton was correct in calling for U.N. reforms (such as voluntary contributions over mandatory financing), but his disdain for the organization ultimately hurt U.S. soft power. He was also in favor of ousting Saddam Hussein, a decision he continues to stand by, and helped build a faulty case of Saddam possessing weapons of mass destruction.

Bolton, therefore, is a nationalist hawk, who in 2000 wrote that the U.S. political debate is essentially between the "Americanists" and "Globalists," where globalists favor multilateralism over U.S. interests. He also believes that launching a pre-emptive strike against North Korea is legal, the only way to stop Iran from building a nuclear weapon is to "bomb Iran," and the U.N. is irrelevant.

But Bolton's appointment and other changes within the administration — Tillerson being replaced by Mike Pompeo, and Gina Haspel being nominated to head the CIA — indicate three things.

First, President Trump has taken a hard-line approach to foreign policy. What that really translates into is a foreign policy of coercion and military tactics over negotiations and diplomacy. For example, Trump declined to certify the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, claiming that Iran is not abiding by the agreement (which is not true). His approach toward North Korea is also inflexible, emphasizing denuclearization as the only viable option. The president's

trade policies are also raising concern. He has initiated tariffs on \$60 billion worth of Chinese exports to the U.S., increasing the chances of a trade war with China.

Second, the president’s hard-line approach is informed by problematic — and questionable — causal links. For example, the president believes that enhanced interrogation techniques work, and produce useful intelligence. In his first State of the Union address, the president declared that the notorious U.S. detention center at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, will remain open to ensure that “hundreds of dangerous terrorists” are not released. Yet, “Gitmo” has served as a recruiting tool for al-Qaida and its various affiliates while scientists and interrogators alike agree that torture doesn’t work. Similarly, the president continues to falsely link immigration with terrorism, a view shared by Bolton.

Third, and not surprisingly, the president wants to surround himself with yes men (and women). The president’s dismissal — and disdain — of expert knowledge has been obvious during his first year, with the ongoing North Korean crisis serving a prime example. While Bolton and the president may not agree on everything (e.g., Bolton believes that the United States should take a harder position on Russia because of its interference in the 2016 election), they are both inclined to ignore expertise.

In other words, Bolton’s appointment dispels any doubt of foreign policy the current administration will pursue. According to Peter Baker of The New York Times, Bolton is an “undiplomatic voice for American might” and views international affairs as a zero-sum game. Furthermore, he believes diplomacy is a tool of the weak.

Above all, he *wants* war. His stance toward Iran is a good example: Throughout his time in the Bush administration, he called for military action toward Iran. In his view, U.S. military action serves U.S. interests, despite evidence indicating that long and unplanned military campaigns as we are currently experiencing in Afghanistan and Iraq have made us less safe.

And as national security adviser, his chances of getting a war — a nuclear one at that! — just grew exponentially. We should all be worried about the current course of U.S. foreign policy.

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