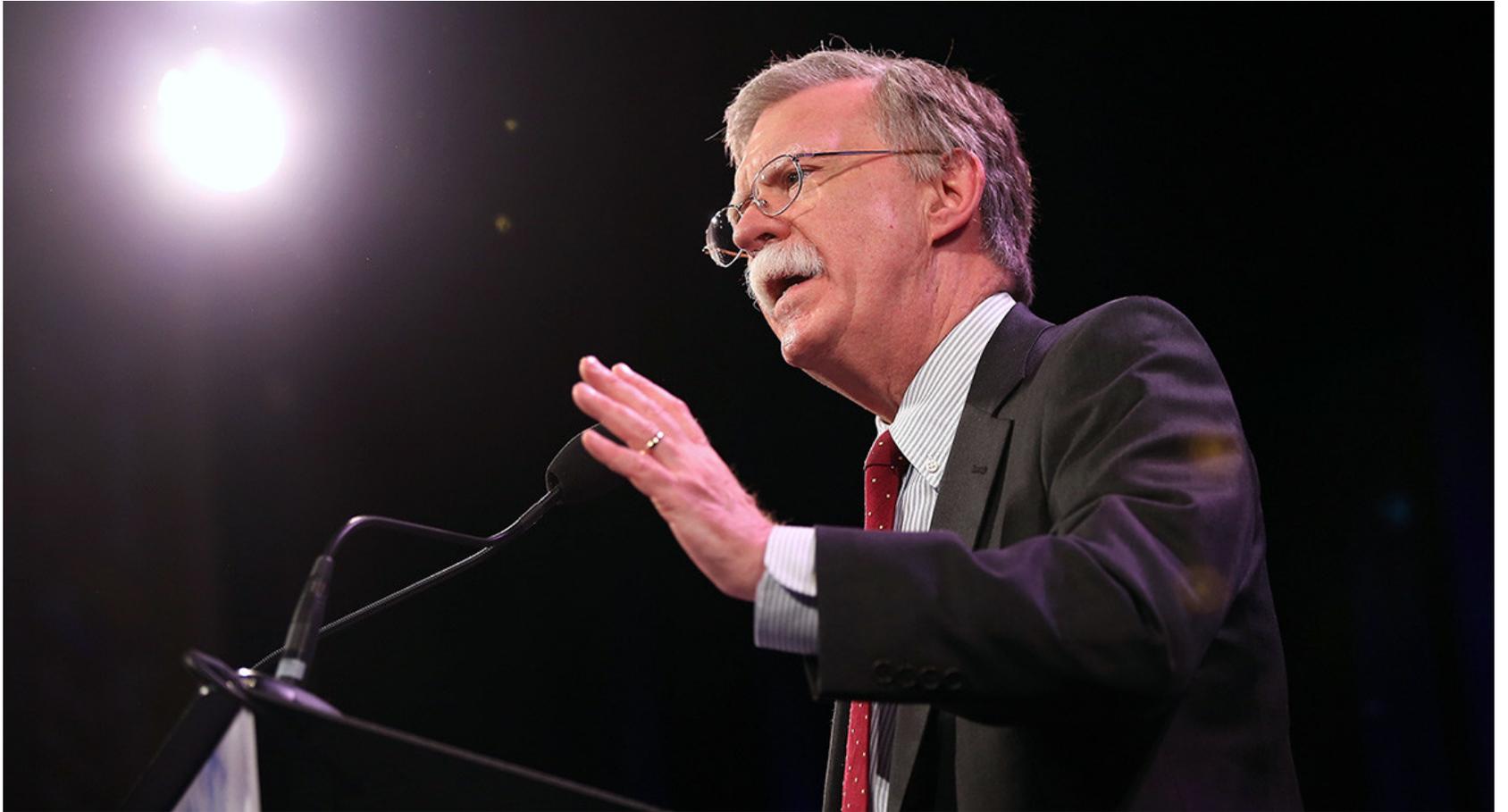


John Bolton, the Anti-McMaster



Washington And The World

Trump's new national security adviser is a unilateralist ideologue who has spent his career spitting in the face of global cooperation. Iran and North Korea are just the start.

By replacing the cautious H.R. McMaster with the fiery John Bolton as national security adviser, President Donald Trump is freeing himself of the last encumbrances on his increasingly strident unilateralism in world affairs. And the effects of this dramatic change are likely to go well beyond the renewed possibility of U.S. military attacks on both Iran and North Korea over their nuclear programs, which Bolton has forcefully advocated. The blunt-spoken Bolton is a Yale-trained expert in international law who has spent a career seeking, ironically, to delegitimize the very idea of international law, and of multilateral action and organizations. Bolton can thus be expected to provide the president with just the intellectual gasoline he needs to ignite new hostilities on any number of global fronts, including an escalated trade war.

During his decades in Washington, Bolton has earned a reputation as an uncompromising nationalist hawk. What is less understood is that Bolton arrived at these positions carefully, thoughtfully and consistently, as a militant libertarian thinker who has believed passionately that the United States has surrendered its sovereignty for far too long to multilateral treaties and organizations of all kinds, including the United Nations. In articles and speeches, he has gone so far as to question whether "globalism" or international law have any legitimacy under the U.S. Constitution. In [a 2000 essay](#) in the Chicago Journal of International Law titled "Should We Take Global

Governance Seriously?" Bolton cast the U.S. political debate as a clash between two "parties"—what he called the "Americanists" versus the "Globalists"—and that he, as a "convinced Americanist," was engaged in a losing battle for America's very soul. "Americanists find themselves surrounded by small armies of Globalists, each tightly clutching a favorite new treaty or multilateralist proposal," Bolton wrote.

Bolton then proceeded to attack nearly every major multilateral convention, including the 1997 Kyoto Protocol on Global Warming, the Land Mines Convention in Ottawa and the International Criminal Court. Over the years, he also has taken on the Biological Weapons Convention and the World Trade Organization, among other multilateral treaties, and continues to do so. Trump's new unilateral trade tariffs against China will likely meet with his incoming national security adviser's approval.

In what has since become his mantra, Bolton wrote back then that globalism "represents a kind of worldwide cartelization of governments and interest groups," and "the costs to the United States—reduced constitutional autonomy, impaired popular sovereignty, reduction of our international power, and limitations on our domestic and foreign policy options and solutions—are far too great." This puts him at odds with the 70-odd year consensus that has guided U.S. foreign policy since World War II: that a world of rule-based cooperation rather than atavistic competition is ultimately in American interests, too.

What lies behind Bolton's current stance against any deal with North Korea and the nuclear treaty with Iran is a long and embattled history of infighting that harks back to his unwavering determination to put his theoretical unilateralism into action. Because North Korea is an "imminent threat," he wrote last month in a Wall Street Journal piece titled "The Legal Case for Striking North Korea First," "it is perfectly legitimate" for the U.S. to strike without having to worry about any multilateral say-so. Similarly on Iran, Bolton wrote that the nuclear agreement negotiated by the Obama administration and approved by the U.N. Security Council was a "diplomatic Waterloo."

During his tenure as George W. Bush's undersecretary of state for arms control, and later as a recess-appointed U.N. ambassador, Bolton often enraged U.S. allies with his recalcitrance to the point where both Secretary of State Colin Powell and his successor, Condoleezza Rice, sought to get rid of him. At a meeting in London in November 2003, Powell's counterpart, British Foreign Secretary Jack Straw, complained to the secretary of state that Bolton's belligerence was making it impossible to reach allied agreement on Iran's nuclear program. Powell turned to an aide and said, "Get a different view," according to a government source at the time. Unbeknownst to Bolton, the aide then interviewed experts in Bolton's own Nonproliferation Bureau. The issue was resolved only after Powell adopted softer language recommended by these experts on how and when Iran might be referred to

the U.N. Security Council.

That same year, British officials persuaded the White House to keep Bolton off the team negotiating with Libya to surrender its nuclear program. A crucial issue, according to sources involved in the affair, was the dictator Moammar Gadhafi's demand that if Libya abandoned its WMD program, the U.S. in turn would drop its goal of regime change. Bolton was unwilling to support this compromise, and the White House finally agreed to keep him "out of the loop," as one source put it to my then-Newsweek colleague John Barry at the time. A deal was finally struck without him.

If nothing else, Bolton has proved unerringly true to his philosophical views. During his tension-filled career at the U.N. and State Department (he once told me in a 2002 interview that he felt surrounded by "enemies" at State), he consistently brooked no interference from allies and fulminated at interference from anyone, especially U.N. "civil servants." Before he became U.N. ambassador—in a recess appointment because even many Senate Republicans would not back him—Bolton infamously proposed that if the U.N. Secretariat in New York "lost 10 stories, it wouldn't make a bit of difference." When the No. 2 official at the U.N., Mark Malloch Brown, suggested that Americans were acting against their own interests when they bashed the world body, Bolton exploded. Malloch Brown, in a speech, warned Americans they could "lose" the organization if they continued "the prevailing practice of seeking to use the U.N. almost by stealth as a diplomatic tool while failing to stand up for it against its domestic critics." In response, Bolton declared that Malloch Brown, as a mere "international civil servant" rather than a representative of an individual country, had no right to say such things. "It's just illegitimate," Bolton said.

Arriving at a time when Trump appears to be giving voice more to his own anti-globalist and unilateralist instincts, Bolton will no doubt encourage these tendencies with a kind of career-vindicating glee. He will lend eager validation to the "America First" views that Trump has embraced since his presidential campaign: that the United States can and should act alone as it pleases. "We will no longer surrender this country or its people to the false song of globalism," Trump said in his defining foreign policy speech as a candidate in the spring of 2016. "The nation-state remains the true foundation for happiness and harmony. I am skeptical of international unions that tie us up and bring America down." The language of Trump's in-your-face inaugural address echoed these views: "From this moment on, it's going to be America First," he said.

Bolton's predecessor, H.R. McMaster, an Army lieutenant general, was no soft-hearted globalist, but he was known to urge the president to be cautious in moving away from multilateral cooperation. Both McMaster and recently ousted Secretary of State Rex Tillerson reportedly were in favor of finding ways to maintain the Iran nuclear treaty, and both their policy views and their occasional differences in style were said to rankle

the president. But in Bolton—and in the incoming secretary of state, the hawkish Mike Pompeo— Trump is likely getting a pair of full-throated cheerleaders.

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