



After Bolton, Trump Goals Remain Unrealized

The sudden and bitter departure of John Bolton from the White House was baked in the cake from the day he arrived there.

For Bolton's worldview, formed and fixed in a Cold War that ended in 1991, was irreconcilable with the policies Donald Trump promised in his 2016 campaign. Indeed, Trump was elected because he offered a foreign policy that represented a repudiation of what John Bolton had advocated since the end of the Cold War.



Trump wanted to call off Cold War II with Russia, to engage with Vladimir Putin, and to extricate us from the Middle East wars into which Bolton and the neocons did so much to plunge the United States.

Where Trump demanded that NATO nations and allies like South Korea and Japan start paying the cost of their own defense, Bolton is an empire man who relishes the global role and responsibilities of America as the last superpower and custodian of the New World Order.

Trump saw in the hermit kingdom of North Korea an opportunity to end its isolation and bring Kim Jong Un into talks to persuade him to give up his nuclear weapons, in return for a full readmission and welcome into the world that Pyongyang turned its back on after World War II.

In Trump's passive acceptance of Kim's resumption of short-range missile tests last August, Bolton surely saw signs of appeasement.

To Bolton, Trump's trashing of Barack Obama's Iran nuclear deal was the first step toward a confrontation and clash to smash the Tehran regime. To Trump, it was a first step to a Trump-negotiated better bargain with Iran.

Bolton's hawkish stance of confrontation, and conflict if necessary to impose our will, from the Eastern Baltic, to Ukraine and the Black Sea, to the Middle East, Persian Gulf, Afghanistan, the Korean Peninsula, today finds almost no broad support among the American electorate.

It is only among foreign policy elites in Beltway think tanks, the generals who ran the national security state, liberal interventionists in the media and the hierarchy of the GOP that we find echoes of Bolton.

The rest of the country has moved on. They want an end to the endless wars and to put America first again.

In the Democratic debates, climate change — the melting ice caps of the Arctic and Greenland —



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represents the real “existential threat.”

Only Rep. Tulsi Gabbard has made foreign policy her focus. But she is the antithesis of Bolton, an anti-interventionist who wants to end the wars and bring the troops home.

Yet, after Bolton’s departure, Trump’s problem is this: What he promised in 2016 he has been unable to deliver.

Rather than summits with Putin, the U.S. and NATO under Trump have sent additional forces to the eastern Baltic. We have let the U.S.-Russian strategic arms agreements lapse. We have sent lethal military aid to Ukraine to fight pro-Russian rebels in the Donbass.

Bibi Netanyahu, not Trump, holds the meetings with the Russian president, is in Moscow again this week, and has plastered a huge poster of himself and Putin at his Likud Party’s headquarters in Tel Aviv.

We blacklist Putin, while Bibi relies on Vlad to help bring home the Russian-Jewish vote in Israel’s election next week.

We still have troops in Syria and Iraq and are closer to war with Iran than the day Trump took office. Such a war would become the defining event of Trump’s presidency and leave this country tied down in virtual perpetuity in the Middle East.

Trump’s hopes for a negotiated withdrawal of all U.S. forces from Afghanistan by the end of his first term has been dealt a crippling blow with the cancellation of his Camp David summit with the Taliban.

Indeed, ex-Defense Secretary James Mattis threw cold water this week on the very idea of bringing our troops home. We must keep “boots on the ground” in Afghanistan, said Mattis, we cannot leave the Afghan forces alone to fight the terrorists and hold the country together:

“We’re going to have to stick with those countries that are not yet ready to do it on their own and keep ... enough boots on the ground not to ... turn the ground back over to the very enemy that attacked us before.”

What Mattis is saying is that Trump’s goal of extracting us from the “forever war” entails too great a risk, and U.S. troops in Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan will have to soldier on, indefinitely.

North Korea continues to test missiles that may not be able to hit the U.S. homeland, but they could hit U.S. troops and bases in South Korea and Japan.

If, by 2020, Kim Jong Un still refuses to give up his nuclear weapons, Iran is back to enriching uranium, the Taliban atrocities continue unabated, and U.S. troops remain in Iraq, Syria and Afghanistan in the same numbers they are today, what does Trump do? What does Trump say?

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