Senator McCain solicits support in Australia for Trump's removal

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Among the most fundamental precepts of US foreign policy is the adage: "Politics stops at the water's edge."

Coined in 1947 at the start of the Cold War by Republican Senator Arthur H. Vandenberg, the phrase expresses the conception that, whatever the internal divisions over foreign policy, they must be subordinated to the united front the US political establishment presents to the world. Under no circumstances should an American political leader traveling abroad denounce the head of state.

This principle was explosively thrown overboard by Arizona Senator John McCain on Tuesday. Speaking in Australia before high-ranking state and military officials, including two former prime ministers, McCain delivered a damning indictment of Donald Trump and called upon the Australian government to defy his administration.

"I realize that some of President Trump's actions and statements have unsettled America's friends," he said. "They have unsettled many Americans as well. There is a real debate underway now in my country about what kind of role America should play in the world. And frankly, I do not know how this debate will play out.

"What I do believe, and I do not think I am exaggerating here, is that the future of the world will turn, to a large extent, on how this debate in America is resolved."

Imagine for a moment that the roles were reversed. If a high-ranking Australian government official came to the United States to denounce the Australian prime minister before American officials, it would legitimately be interpreted to mean he was soliciting support for the removal of the current head of his own government.

As a senior senator, former Republican presidential candidate, chairman of the powerful Senate Armed Services Committee, an admiral's son and former military officer himself, with countless private connections to the military, McCain is speaking as one of the most powerful figures in American politics.

He continued: "I know that many of you have a lot of questions about where America is headed under President Trump. Frankly, so do many Americans… But it has many decent, capable people—Jim Mattis, H.R. McMaster, John Kelly, Mike Pompeo, Dan Coats, Rex Tillerson—people who deserve your support, and need it."

The figures named by McCain include three generals—Secretary of Defense James Mattis, National Security Adviser H. R. McMaster and Secretary of Homeland Security John Kelly—along with CIA Director Mike Pompeo, Director of National Intelligence Dan Coats and the former Exxon Mobil CEO and current secretary of state, Rex Tillerson. Significantly, McCain left out the vice president, Mike Pence.

If this is what McCain says in public about the American president and head of his own party, what is he saying in private? He began his remarks by noting that, over the previous several days, he had met with "Prime Minister Turnbull and his team, as well as opposition leaders" and "Australian diplomats, parliamentarians, [and] military officers." He likewise no doubt spoke with admirals and generals from the US Navy and Marines.

McCain's selection of Australia is not an accident. The US is stepping up its confrontation with China and stands on the brink of war with North Korea. It sees Australia as a critical strategic ally in the unfolding conflict in the Asia/Pacific theater. Washington has been deeply involved in every aspect of Australian

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politics, including the removal of Prime Minister Gough Whitlam in 1975 and the ouster of Kevin Rudd in 2010.

Acknowledging that "what is really in question, then, is America's judgment," McCain acknowledged, "I realize there is much to criticize." He then proceeded to side with the Australian government against the policies of the United States.

"I know Australia is now talking with Japan and others about moving forward with the TPP [Trans-Pacific Partnership] despite America's withdrawal. I would strongly encourage that," he said. "So I would urge you to keep at it. And hopefully, someday in the future, under different circumstances, America will decide to join you."

In what cannot simply be dismissed as a coincidence, an editorial appearing in the *New York Times* the next day used nearly identical language. Decrying the collapse of US foreign policy, the *Times* praised German Chancellor Angela Merkel and French President Emmanuel Macron just days after the two leaders had launched political broadsides against the Trump administration.

The *Times* concluded ominously, "For now, it looks as if it is up to Ms. Merkel and Mr. Macron to keep the [NATO] alliance alive and relevant, at least until Mr. Trump wakes up to the need for American leadership or until another, wiser president replaces him."

The people to whom McCain and the *Times* are making their appeal know what such language means: The knives are out at the highest level of the American state.

Political division on this scale can emerge only under conditions of the most acute social crisis. Powerful factions in the US state believe the policies of the Trump administration threaten a complete breakdown of Washington's global authority and hegemonic interests. They are at the same time concerned over increasingly explosive social conditions within the US, and the fact that the ability of the ruling elite to contain these contradictions is gravely undermined by the precipitous decline of America's global prestige.

The conflict rending the American state is between two reactionary factions, each engaged in conspiracies and prepared to use unconstitutional means to reach its ends.

Such an atmosphere creates the conditions for the emergence onto the political scene of the working class, which cannot remain a bystander in this war between contending right-wing sections of the ruling elite, much less side with one or the other. As McCain and his collaborators seek alliances among different groups of imperialists, American workers must seek allies among the international working class and pursue their own revolutionary and socialist strategy—for jobs, an end to war and the defense of democratic rights.

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