Democrats assure confirmation of CIA head as secretary of state

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25 April 2018

Following Monday's party-line vote by the Senate Foreign Relations Committee to recommend that the full Senate confirm his nomination, CIA Director Mike Pompeo is set to become secretary of state in time to attend a Friday meeting of NATO foreign ministers in Brussels.

Floor debate on the nomination is scheduled Wednesday, and a vote is expected on Thursday. Pompeo's confirmation was assured regardless of the outcome of Monday evening's vote on the Foreign Relations Committee because three Senate Democrats had already announced that they would vote for the far-right former congressman from Kansas when the issue came up for a vote by the full chamber.

With the confirmation of Pompeo as head of the State Department, joining the equally right-wing and militaristic John Bolton, who this month replaced Gen. H. R. McMaster as national security adviser to President Trump, the administration's foreign policy team has become even more reckless and war-mongering. Pompeo, a Tea Party Republican and mouthpiece for the billionaire Koch Brothers, and Bolton, a protégé of the fascistic North Carolina Senator Jesse Helms, have advocated war against both Iran and North Korea and a more aggressive and provocative posture toward Russia and China.

Their elevation accelerates a trajectory toward a wider war in Syria and the Middle East, leading inexorably to war with nuclear-armed Russia and China.

Pompeo's confirmation is the outcome of a fraudulent charade of opposition mounted over the past several weeks by the Democratic Party. In fact, the party leadership had no intention of blocking his installation. It staged a show of resistance while ensuring that a sufficient number of Democrats would cast "yes" votes to guarantee Pompeo's installation.

This was underscored by Monday's vote on the Foreign Relations Committee. Until the last minute, it appeared that the committee would vote against recommending Pompeo to the full Senate, with Republican Rand Paul of Kentucky declaring he would join all 10 Democrats on the committee in opposition. That would result in an 11-10 vote against Pompeo.

Republican Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell had already made clear he would bring the nomination before the full Senate even if it failed to win a favorable recommendation from the committee. With three Democrats—Heidi Heitcamp of North Dakota, Joe Manchin of West Virginia and Joe Donnelly of Indiana—already pledged to vote in favor in the narrowly divided (51-49) chamber, the Republicans were assured of a majority in the floor vote.

All three Democrats are running for reelection in states that voted heavily for Trump in 2016 and are acting with the full support of the party leadership. A number of other Democrats, including Senate Minority Leader Charles Schumer of New York and Mark Warner of Virginia, the ranking Democrat on the Intelligence Committee, have not announced and may very well join in backing Pompeo.

However, no nominee for secretary of state has ever been denied a favorable recommendation by the Foreign Relations Committee, and the administration considered a rejection by the committee a significant blow to Pompeo and the authority of the White House. Under pressure from Trump, Rand Paul flipped his vote at the last minute, but the Republicans still faced a delay because Republican Senator Johnny Isakson was unable to attend the meeting and cast the deciding vote.

Under these conditions, Democrat Chris Coons of Delaware changed his vote from "no" to "present" to

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give the Republicans a clear 10-9 majority to approve and forward the nomination to the Senate floor.

Pompeo has compiled a record not only as a war hawk, he also as a vicious opponent of democratic rights.

* He has publicly defended waterboarding and the CIA torture program carried out under the Bush administration.

* He has called for an expansion of the National Security Council's domestic surveillance program.

* In February 2016, he said that Edward Snowden "should be brought back from Russia and given due process and I think the proper outcome would be that he would be given the death sentence."

* In a 2017 speech before the Center for Strategic and International Studies, Pompeo referred to WikiLeaks as "a non-state hostile intelligence service." He continued: "We can no longer allow Assange and his colleagues the latitude to use free speech values against us."

* He opposes abortion rights and has sponsored bills allowing states to prevent same-sex couples from marrying.

* After the 2013 Boston Marathon bombing, he said he doubted "the commitment to peace by adherents of the Muslim faith."

In the midst of a furious faction fight within the ruling class and the state, in which the Democrats are allied with sections of the intelligence establishment that consider Trump too "soft" on Russia and insufficiently aggressive in Syria, both parties are collaborating to install such a figure to head the State Department. This shows that despite the sharp differences over foreign policy questions, to the point of crippling the Trump White House or possibly removing it from office, there is bipartisan agreement on a strategic orientation toward war with those powers seen as obstacles to US hegemony over the world, as well as the imposition of police-state censorship and repression to crush social and political opposition.

The main theme of Democratic critics of Pompeo's nomination has been the charge that he is insufficiently hawkish toward Russia and cannot be trusted to oppose any softening of the US line on North Korea. Interviewed Monday on National Public Radio's "Morning Edition" program, Wendy Sherman, undersecretary of state under Obama, said, "Certainly on the issue of great concern to the United States and to the Congress, what the administration will do to push back on Russia, they don't see Mr. Pompeo as really having led that charge. So they have a lot of concerns about this."

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