

The Democratic Party and the confirmation of Mike Pompeo

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Former Congressman and CIA Director Mike Pompeo was confirmed Thursday afternoon by the US Senate to be secretary of state. The former Army tank commander, a supporter of torture and unlimited domestic spying, will now hold the top position in the Trump cabinet, as well as being fourth in line of succession to the presidency.

The installation of Pompeo as head of the State Department in place of Rex Tillerson follows President Trump's replacement of Gen. H. R. McMaster with former Bush administration official and Iraq War conspirator John Bolton as national security adviser. Both Pompeo and Bolton have called for war against Iran and North Korea. They form a new foreign policy team that is even more reckless than the preceding one. Their installation signals an accelerated drive to a wider war in the Middle East and military conflict with Russia and China.

Pompeo embodies the link between imperialist war-mongering and political repression within the United States. He has defended waterboarding and the Bush administration's CIA torture program. In a speech last year he called WikiLeaks a "non-state hostile intelligence service." He has called for the trial and execution of whistleblower Edward Snowden and advocates an expansion of the National Security Agency's illegal mass surveillance program.

Pompeo was immediately sworn in by ultra-right Supreme Court Justice Samuel Alito. The new secretary of state boarded a plane to fly overnight to Brussels, where he will represent the US government at a NATO foreign ministers conference. This assemblage will discuss actions against Russia over the false charges of poisoning a former British double agent, Sergei Skripal, as well as Russian support for Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, whose regime was the target

of US, French and British missile strikes earlier this month.

Russia and Syria are only two of a series of impending confrontations in which Pompeo will play a central role:

On May 12, President Trump is expected to formally disavow the Iran nuclear agreement, putting the US on a collision course both with Iran and the five other countries that signed the deal, to which Iran has scrupulously adhered.

On May 14, the State Department, which Pompeo now heads, will officially transfer the US embassy in Israel from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, a deliberate provocation against the Palestinian population of the West Bank and Gaza, which regards East Jerusalem as its historical capital.

On May 20, Venezuela holds its presidential election. The State Department is expected to denounce the predicted victory of incumbent Nicholas Maduro and declare the election fraudulent, setting the stage for economic sanctions or even a boycott of Venezuela's oil exports by the US, its largest customer.

In late May or early June, Trump is to hold the summit meeting with North Korean leader Kim Jong-un, which was prepared by Pompeo's secret visit to Pyongyang earlier this month. In the event that the summit is called off, or breaks up without progress, the US government will accelerate its plans for a military strike against North Korean missile and nuclear test sites or an attack against the regime as a whole.

The Senate approved Pompeo's nomination by a vote of 57-42, with six Democrats and one independent who caucuses with the Democrats supporting him. But the role of the Democrats was far more important than these numbers might suggest. Without the support of Democrats at key moments, Pompeo's confirmation

was in serious question.

After his appearance before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee April 12, where he adopted the posture of a “moderate,” forswearing his past record of warmongering against Iran and North Korea, Senate vote counters found that his nomination was in danger of being defeated.

With Republicans holding only a narrow 51-49 margin and Senator John McCain absent due to brain cancer, libertarian Rand Paul of Kentucky threatened to tip the balance against Pompeo, declaring he would oppose the CIA director because of his well-publicized defense of torture. If Paul joined 49 Democrats in opposing Pompeo, the nomination would fail by a vote of 50-49.

At this critical point, on Friday, April 20, Democratic Senator Heidi Heitkamp of North Dakota announced that she would support Pompeo’s nomination as secretary of state, thus assuring the 50 votes needed for confirmation. On Monday, April 23, two more right-wing Democrats, Joe Donnelly of Indiana and Joe Manchin of West Virginia, followed suit.

With the nomination assured, Rand Paul dropped his token opposition and announced that he too would vote to confirm. Pompeo actually won a slightly larger majority than his predecessor Tillerson, who was confirmed by a margin of 56 to 43.

While Senate Minority Leader Charles Schumer and the ranking Democrat on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Ben Cardin, made public displays of opposition to Pompeo and voted against his confirmation, this was a cynical political charade. Schumer and Cardin actually agree with Pompeo on some of his most inflammatory positions, like tearing up the Iran nuclear agreement.

More fundamentally, the Democrats support the militaristic foreign policy posture of the Trump administration, criticizing it only from the right, as insufficiently belligerent toward Russia and Russian President Vladimir Putin. That has been the driving force of Democratic support to the investigation into bogus charges of Russian interference in the 2016 elections, being carried out by special counsel Robert Mueller.

Privately, the Democrats welcomed the nomination of Pompeo, a notorious “hawk” on US policy towards Russia. This was spelled out in an editorial April 12 by

the *Washington Post*, one of the main voices of the Democratic wing of the US political establishment, which has spearheaded the anti-Russia campaign against the Trump White House.

The *Post* editorial, headlined “Confirm Mike Pompeo,” noted that the nominee “was tough on Russia, saying conflicts with it were caused by ‘Russia’s bad behavior’... Mr. Pompeo acknowledged that sanctions against Vladimir Putin’s regime had been inadequate and promised to ‘reset... deterrence.’”

An accompanying commentary by *Post* editorial board member Josh Rogin hailed Pompeo’s statement to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, where he declared, “The actions of this administration make clear that President Trump’s national security strategy, rightfully, has identified Russia as a danger to our country.”

Rogin pointed to Pompeo’s prepared remarks to the committee, in which he said there should be an increased US commitment to Syria. “The failed state of Syria poses a mounting threat to human rights, national security, and regional stability—and it deserves an increasingly severe response,” Pompeo said. Two days later, Trump ordered a US missile strike on the Syrian regime.

The elevation of this warmonger and enemy of democratic rights only confirms that both parties of the American ruling class are committed to censorship, the criminalization of political dissent and a reckless escalation of US military operations all over the world, which brings with it the increasing danger of a new world war employing nuclear weapons.



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