

Trump adviser John Bolton to conduct pre-election visit to Australia

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US National Security Adviser John Bolton, one of the Trump administration's most aggressive advocates of wars and regime-change interventions, is expected to travel to Australia on the eve of the federal election that is expected to take place in May.

Bolton will arrive in the midst of a gathering political crisis, with the faction-wracked Liberal-National Coalition government having lost control of parliament, accompanied by intense popular hostility toward the entire establishment.

The visit will again underscore the reality that, despite all the unsubstantiated intelligence, political and media hysteria about "Chinese interference" in Australia, it is the US that has repeatedly intervened in Australian politics to ensure compliance with Washington's corporate and strategic interests.

In the lead-up to the looming election, Bolton's visit will intensify the US pressure on both the unstable Coalition and the opposition Labor Party to reaffirm their commitment to Washington's increasingly provocative confrontation with China, Australian capitalism's largest export market.

According to the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC), Bolton is expected to arrive in the country on the back of President Donald Trump's second planned summit with North Korean leader Kim Jong-un, scheduled to take place in Vietnam at the end of this month. At that summit, Trump will intensify the US push for the North Korean regime to turn against China, on the promise of US diplomatic recognition and economic aid.

"Government sources" told the ABC that Bolton's trip was still in the early stages of planning, but they expected Bolton to focus on US-Australian military cooperation, cyber security and "China's strategic ambitions in the region."

Although both the old ruling parties have repeatedly pledged their fidelity to Canberra's post-World War II

military alliance with the US, neither has yet publicly agreed to join the Pentagon in conducting "freedom of navigation operations" (FONOPs) within the territorial waters of Chinese-occupied islets in the South China Sea.

Last October, Bolton openly called for Australia and Britain to mount such operations, which would heighten the danger of military clashes with China that could trigger a full-scale war. He said the US and its allies had "to do more" to show they did not recognise the legitimacy of the artificial islands that Beijing has constructed in the sea's contested waters.

Last Monday, in its second FONOP this year, the US Navy sent two guided missile destroyers within the 12-nautical-mile territorial limit claimed by China around Mischief Reef in the Spratly islands group. On the same day, responding to the US push, the embattled British government announced that the aircraft-carrier *Queen Elizabeth*, with two squadrons of F-35 stealth fighters, would be sent into disputed waters in the Pacific.

The Trump-Kim meeting in Hanoi is being held against the backdrop of a mounting US offensive against China. The White House has threatened to impose greater punitive tariffs on China by next month unless Beijing agrees to far-reaching US demands to abandon its quest to develop the country's high-tech industries.

Last month, Bolton himself spelled out the agenda behind the US-China "trade talks." He underscored the broader drive by the US to maintain its economic and military supremacy over China. He told the *Washington Times* that the purpose of Trump's demands was not simply to "right" the trade deficit "but to prevent an imbalance in political/military power in the future as well."

The timing of Bolton's trip is ominous more broadly. For decades he has been in the forefront of the drive within Washington's ruling establishment to use US military might to reassert its flagging global hegemony.

He is notorious internationally as a leading advocate of the criminal US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003, a vocal supporter of the murderous US interventions in Libya and Syria, and a vehement agitator for US military, economic and other operations to install puppet regimes in Iran and Venezuela.

Since Trump appointed him as national security adviser last March, Bolton increasingly has become the most belligerent face of US imperialism. In keeping with the openly bullying and fascistic character of the Trump administration, he has publicly advocated militarist policies.

In recent weeks, Bolton has focussed his fire on the Venezuelan government of President Nicolas Maduro. On a single day this month, Bolton issued seven tweets, several directed at Maduro and his allies. "It's time for Maduro to get out of the way," he wrote.

This week, Bolton recorded a video, which was tweeted through the White House's official account, sending a similar message to Iran's rulers on the 40th anniversary of the revolution that overthrew the Shah of Iran's 25-year US-backed dictatorship. "I don't think you'll have many more anniversaries to enjoy," Bolton declared.

Some Washington allies have been in the firing line as well. Bolton warned India this week against buying Venezuelan oil, saying it "will not be forgotten." So far, the Indian government has declined to recognise Juan Guaidó, a right-wing US-backed political operative, as Venezuela's "interim president."

Bolton's visit also comes in the wake of the Trump administration's selection of Arthur B. Culvahouse, a highly-connected member of the political-intelligence establishment, with a decades-long track record of involvement in political crises, as ambassador to Australia.

Last August, Trump quickly endorsed the removal of Prime Minister Scott Morrison's predecessor Malcolm Turnbull, who was demonstrably loyal to the US alliance but had sought to mend business and diplomatic relations with Beijing.

In recent weeks, Morrison has sought to meet Washington's requirements by announcing the construction of a new US-Australian naval base on Papua New Guinea's strategic Manus Island, stripping Australian residency from Chinese businessman and political donor Huang Xiangmo, touring the southwest Pacific to reinforce Australian and US interests in that region against China, and recognising Guaidó as Venezuela's president.

In each case, the Labor Party has loudly backed the decisions, in line with its record of championing the US-Australia military and strategic alliance.

Bolton's visit follows that of a succession of key US figures in the past two years, including Vice President Mike Pence, ex-Democratic presidential candidate Hillary Clinton, and former Republican presidential candidate John McCain. Each insisted that Canberra must remain totally committed to Washington's geostrategic confrontation with China.

During Barack Obama's administration, Vice President Joe Biden spelled out Washington's attitude in a July 2016 visit to Australia. "It's never a good bet to bet against the United States," he declared. It was a crude warning to those in the Australian corporate elite concerned to preserve economic ties with China.

The leaders of both the Coalition and Labor are acutely aware of the history of US interventions in Australia. Washington and its ambassador Marshall Green played a central role in the 1975 "Canberra Coup," in which Gough Whitlam's Labor government was dismissed after it began to lose control over the industrial and social movement in the working class.

In mid-2010, Labor and union powerbrokers who were "protected sources" of the US embassy ousted Kevin Rudd as Labor's prime minister in favour of Julia Gillard. While entirely pro-US, Rudd had suggested that the US should make some accommodation to China's rise. Gillard quickly committed to Obama's anti-China "pivot to Asia," including the stationing of US Marines in the northern strategic port of Darwin. There are ample reasons to suspect a US hand in the August 2018 ousting of Malcolm Turnbull as well.

Bolton's planned visit is another warning that US imperialism will stop at nothing to ensure Australian governments remain fully committed to the escalating US offensive against China, and to suppressing any opposition to war and social inequality.



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