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Sanctions: Failure of U.S. Foreign Policy



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President Donald Trump's meeting with North Korea's Supreme Leader, Kim Jong Un, on June 30th may turn out to be more than just another publicity stunt similar to the failed "summit" held in Vietnam in February – a political fiasco.

The New York Times and other media report that Trump is planning to revise the terms of U.S. policy toward N. Korea's nuclear weapons arsenal. He is apparently planning to shift from insisting on total denuclearization to a freeze-in-place policy, thus permitting

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N. Korea to maintain its current nuclear arsenal. Such a revision would lead to a significant change in the sanctions the U.S. imposes on N. Korea to enforce its demand for complete denuclearization, one embraced by the previous three presidents – and that has not worked.

In response to Trump’s meeting with Kim and a possible revision of the N. Korea policy, John Bolton, the National Security Advisor (NSA), freaked out. “I read this NYT story with curiosity. Neither the NSC staff nor I have discussed or heard of any desire to ‘settle for a nuclear freeze by NK,’” he tweeted. He added, its “a reprehensible attempt by someone to box in the President.” In April 2018, shortly after assuming the role of NSA, Bolton called for a preemptive war with N. Korea.

I read this NYT story with curiosity. Neither the NSC staff nor I have discussed or heard of any desire to “settle for a nuclear freeze by NK.” This was a reprehensible attempt by someone to box in the President. There should be consequences.
<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/06/30/world/asia/trump-kim-north-korea-negotiations.html> ...

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This North Korea Nuclear Deal Would Halt New Weapons but Leave Arsenal Intact

An idea taking shape inside the Trump administration would amount to negotiating a nuclear freeze that essentially enshrines the status quo, tacitly accepting the North as a nuclear power.

The U.S.'s military might be the most powerful weapon in the country's arsenal, but economic sanctions are being fully exploited to go after "enemies" real or imagined. The U.S. Treasury Dept. identifies 30 active sanctions programs that include, according to one estimate, 7,967 operating sanctions.

The Council of Foreign Relations (CFR) defines an economic sanction "as the withdrawal of customary trade and financial relations for foreign and security policy purposes." It notes that the modern sanction era began in the wake of the Cuban Revolution and escalated following the 9/11 attacks when Pres. George W. Bush signed an Executive Order (#13224) that gave the Treasury Department officials "authority to freeze the assets and financial transactions of individuals and other entities suspected of supporting terrorism."

The CFR identifies a variety of ways that economic and banking/financial-services sanctions are imposed. They include long-standing sanctions, exemplified by the embargo of Cuba that persisted since the revolution (with some moderation during the Obama era); comprehensive sanctions applied to Iran, Sudan and Syria; and "smart" sanctions that aim to minimize the suffering of innocent civilians. In addition, it identifies still other sanctions including travel bans, asset freezes, arms embargoes, capital restraints, foreign aid reductions and trade restrictions. Among the most successful international sanctions were against South Africa's apartheid regime in the 1980s and Saddam Hussein's Iraq regime in the 1990s

Trump and, more so, his war-hawk advisor, Bolton, need an enemy to give focus to – or a target for — U.S. foreign policy. And they've got any number of supposed "enemies" to choose from. Efforts against N. Korea have been hamstrung by Trump fantasy role as a "stateman." Nevertheless, N. Korea is suffering under enormous sanctions but remains safeguarded from military attack by China which Bolton & company do not dare to attack other than in terms of low-level trade/tariffs conflicts.

Another leading supposed national-security threat is the "troika of tyranny," as Bolton disparages Cuba, Venezuela and Nicaragua. He's dubbed their respective leaders — Cuba's Miguel Díaz-Canel, Venezuela's Nicolás Maduro and Nicaragua's Daniel Ortega

— “the three stooges of socialism.” Like a thorn in its toe, for half-a-century the U.S. has failed to overthrow the Cuban revolution, whether by military invasion, attempted assassinations of Fidel Castro and innumerable clandestine disruptions of the Cuban economy. All efforts have failed.

In April, Bolton gave the keynote speech Coral Gables, FL, at the 58th anniversary of the failed American-backed Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba. He spoke before the surviving members of Brigade 2506, a group of Cuban-American veterans of the failed effort and announced the administration’s intent to activate a portion of the 1996 Libertad Act that permits U.S. citizens to sue for property seized in Cuba after 1959 revolution.

Bolton proclaimed, “... we have imposed even further sanctions, tightened restrictions, and scaled back U.S. personnel at Embassy Havana in response to the vicious attacks on American diplomats.” He added, “[we] imposed sanctions on four companies and nine vessels that transported oil from Venezuela to Cuba in recent months. This follows our action earlier this month to sanction 35 vessels, and two companies, involved in shipping subsidized oil from Venezuela to Cuba.”

Bolton’s attitude speaks to a deeper outlook that he embodies. For him, any country in the Americas that challenges U.S. hegemony violates the legitimacy of the 1823 Monroe Doctrine, by which the U.S. claims control over Latin America and is seen as a national-security threat. As he insisted, “We proudly proclaim for all to hear: The Monroe Doctrine is alive and well.”

He championed new sanctions against Venezuela’s Central Bank that prohibit access to U.S. dollars. He also proudly noted that Trump had issued an Executive Order targeting Nicaragua’s government for engaging in corruption, human rights abuses, dismantling of democratic institutions and the exploitation of people and public resources.

And then there is Iran. Bolton has backed the overthrow of Iran’s post-Shah government since the Islamic revolution of 1979 when U.S. Embassy staff were taken hostage and the Shah was ousted. With Trump, Bolton finally has a president and administration that might play his game. They are pushing the tough sanctions to punish ordinary Iranians in an effort to see if this suffering can provoke a military incident.

In May 2018, Trump announced that the U.S. was withdrawing from the 2015 Iran nuclear deal, the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) backed by the “P5+1” — the U.S., UK, France, China and Russia plus Germany and the European Union. Shortly

after Trump's unilateral action, Bolton said that U.S. would impose sanctions on European companies that maintain business dealings with Iran.

A year later, Bolton provocatively announced the U.S. was deploying the USS Abraham Lincoln Carrier Strike Group and a bomber task force to the Middle East. The action's purpose was, in Bolton's words, "to send a clear and unmistakable message to the Iranian regime that any attack on United States interests or on those of our allies will be met with unrelenting force." It was followed by the announcement that sanctions would be imposed on Iran's Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, as well as everyone in Khamenei's office or appointed by him.

If that strategy doesn't work, one can expect that the CIA, Israel or Saudi operatives will instigate a "false flag" incident and claim that Iranian forces attacked U.S. interests. However, Trump seems resistant to starting a military initiative that can't be contained or the outcome unpredictable. One can well imagine some within his military and foreign-policy teams – but not Bolton – cautious about entering another Afghanistan-Iraq-type war that has no end. While Trump and his advisors might now be hesitant to launch an all-out military campaign before the 2020 elections, all bets are off if he is reelected.

Finally, Bolton seeks to not simply promote sanctions against individual countries and individuals identified as a national-security threat, but also against the International Criminal Court (ICC). In September 2018, he insisted that the U.S. government would use "any means necessary" to protect its citizens and allies from ICC prosecution. "United States will use any means necessary to protect our citizens and those of our allies from unjust prosecution by this illegitimate court," he ranted. He specified that these actions could include tariffs and prosecution. "We will ban its financial system and we will prosecute them in the US criminal system. We will do the same for any company or state that assists an ICC investigation of Americans," he stated.

Bolton is an old-fashioned, non-repentant anti-communist in a world where old-fashioned communism has all but disappeared; only Cuba holds on. He would have fit in with the good-old McCarthy/HUAC ranters but they have disappeared from the historical stage. So, he picks new enemies — be they Iran, Cuba, Venezuela or N. Korea – and reinvents the cold war for the 21st century, claiming these suffering countries are actual threats to U.S. imperial hegemony.

A recent New Yorker profile by Dexter Filkins offers a revealing glimpse into how an old-fashioned working-class boy (son of a fireman) from Baltimore, MD, morphed in a reactionary war-hawk. He got scholarships to Yale and Yale Law School, developed a lifelong friendship with Yale classmate Clarence Thomas, interned with Vice-President Spiro Agnew, slugged it out in the federal bureaucracy, landed a “recess appointment” by Bush-II as UN Ambassador and now is NSA.

Most telling, he’s been a consist, hardline conservative Republican since day one. He supported the Vietnam War, but hid-out in the National Guard to avoid combat. He opposed the 1993 Chemical Weapons Convention, a treaty endorsed by the U.S. and 192 other countries. And he long supported the most reactionary Islamic extremists in Iran, the M.E.K., that from 1997 to 2012 was listed as a terrorist group.

Bolton serves Trump by forever screaming the worst-case scenario – tightening the screws with sanctions and proclamations of imminent military intervention. His strategy is exemplified by his support for Juan Guaidó, an American puppet, and threats to overthrow the Venezuela government. Sanctions have made life worse for the Venezuela people, let alone the people of N. Korea, Iran and Cuba, but no direct military actions have occurred. Their respective regimes remain in power. What happens if Trump wins the 2020 election is a story yet to be told.

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