

## **‘The Bolton Gambit Succeeded’: Critics Warn Top Trump Adviser Has Put UK on Path to War with Iran**

"By threatening Iran with 'serious consequences,' without knowing what that may entail, Britain blindly dances to the beat of [U.S. national security adviser John] Bolton's war drums."

By [Jake Johnson](#)

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Region: [Europe](#), [Middle East & North Africa](#)

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*With the United Kingdom and Iran in the midst of a tense and dangerous standoff after the tit-for-tat [seizure](#) of [oil tankers](#) in the Strait of Hormuz, international observers are warning that the British government has fallen into a trap set by hawkish U.S. national security adviser John Bolton that could lead to a devastating military conflict.*

After British commandos earlier this month [swarmed and detained](#) Iran's Grace 1 oil supertanker in waters east of Gibraltar, Bolton [applauded](#) the move as "excellent news" and said "America and our allies will continue to prevent regimes in Tehran and Damascus from profiting off this illicit trade."

Simon Tisdall, foreign affairs editor and commentator for *The Guardian*, [wrote](#) over the weekend that "Bolton's delighted reaction suggested the seizure was a surprise."

"But accumulating evidence suggests the opposite is true, and that Bolton's national security team was directly involved in manufacturing the Gibraltar incident," wrote Tisdall. "The suspicion is that Conservative politicians, distracted by picking a new prime minister, jockeying for power, and preoccupied with Brexit, stumbled into an American trap."

Shortly after British forces seized Grace 1, Spanish Foreign Minister Josep Borrell said the U.K.'s capture of the tanker was [carried out under orders](#) from the United States.

Tisdall pointed to a [story](#) last week by Spanish newspaper *El Pais*, which reported that the Iranian tanker "had been under surveillance by U.S. satellites since April."

"Although Spanish officials, speaking after the event, said they would have intercepted the ship 'if we had had the information and the opportunity,' Spain took no action at the time," Tisdall wrote. "But Bolton, in any case, was not relying on Madrid. The U.S. had already tipped off Britain. On 4 July, after Grace 1 entered British-Gibraltar territorial waters, the fateful order was issued in London—it is not known by whom—and 30 marines stormed aboard."

The U.K.'s seizure of Grace 1—denounced by the Iranian government as an act of "[maritime](#)

[piracy](#)”—led Iran to counter on Friday by capturing a British tanker in the Strait of Hormuz, ratcheting up tensions in the Persian Gulf and prompting the British government to warn of “[serious consequences](#)” if the tanker was not released.

The perilous standoff, Tisdall argued, is precisely the outcome Bolton was seeking.

“The Bolton gambit succeeded,” Tisdall wrote. “Despite its misgivings, Britain has been co-opted on to the front line of Washington’s confrontation with Iran. The process of polarization, on both sides, is accelerating. The nuclear deal is closer to total collapse. And by threatening Iran with ‘serious consequences,’ without knowing what that may entail, Britain blindly dances to the beat of Bolton’s war drums.”

Iranian Foreign Minister Javad Zarif offered a similar assessment in a [series of tweets](#) on Sunday.

Make no mistake:

Having failed to lure [@realDonaldTrump](#) into War of the Century, and fearing collapse of his [#B\\_Team](#), [@AmbJohnBolton](#) is turning his venom against the UK in hopes of dragging it into a quagmire.

Only prudence and foresight can thwart such ploys.

— Javad Zarif (@JZarif) [July 21, 2019](#)

The B Team is the name Zarif has given to a group of officials that consists of Bolton, Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, Abu Dhabi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Zayed, and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

Bolton in particular has been at the center of escalating military tensions between the U.S. and Iran, which were sparked by Trump’s decision last year to [violate](#) the Iran nuclear accord.

As *Common Dreams* [reported](#) in May, Bolton used the routine deployment of a U.S. bomber task force to the Middle East to threaten Iran with “unrelenting force.”

After Iran in June [shot down an unmanned U.S. drone](#) that it said violated its airspace, Bolton was among the group of officials urging Trump to retaliate with airstrikes. The president [approved the strikes then backed off](#) at the last minute.

Trita Parsi, executive vice president of the Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft, warned Sunday that by following Washington’s orders in the Gulf, the U.K. is repeating the mistakes it made in the lead-up to the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq.

“In 2003, the U.K. broke with the E.U. and foolishly sided with Bush over Iraq. London not only devastated the Middle East, it also undermined the E.U.,” Parsi [tweeted](#). “Now, the U.K. is at it again by doing Bolton’s bidding and allowing him to make the U.K./E.U. collateral damage in his war plans with Iran.”

“Why did the U.K. agree to Bolton’s request to confiscate an Iranian oil tanker,

knowing very well Iran would retaliate by taking a British one in return?" Parsi asked. "Does the U.K. want war? Does E.U. interest not matter to London? Stunned these questions haven't been asked. Answers are needed."

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Articles by: [Jake Johnson](#)

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