

The Untold Story of John Bolton's Campaign for War with Iran

Everyone knows Bolton is a hawk. Less understood is how he labored in secret to drive Washington and Tehran apart.

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In my reporting on U.S.-Israeli policy, I have tracked numerous episodes in which the United States and/or Israel made moves that seemed to indicate preparations for war against Iran. Each time—in [2007](#), in [2008](#), and again in [2011](#)—those moves, presented in corporate media as presaging attacks on Tehran, were actually bluffs aimed at putting pressure on the Iranian government.

But the strong likelihood that Donald Trump will now choose John Bolton as his next national security advisor creates a prospect of war with Iran that is very real. Bolton is no ordinary neoconservative hawk. He has been obsessed for many years with going to war against the Islamic Republic, calling repeatedly for bombing Iran in his regular appearances on Fox News, without the slightest indication that he understands the consequences of such a policy.

His is not merely a rhetorical stance: Bolton actively conspired during his tenure as the Bush administration's policymaker on Iran from 2002 through 2004 to establish the political conditions necessary for the administration to carry out military action.

More than anyone else inside or outside the Trump administration, Bolton has already influenced Trump to tear up the Iran nuclear deal. Bolton parlayed his connection with the primary financier behind both Benjamin Netanyahu and Donald Trump himself—the militantly Zionist casino magnate Sheldon Adelson—to get Trump's ear last October, just as the president was preparing to announce his policy on the Iran nuclear agreement, the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). He spoke with Trump by phone from Las Vegas after [meeting with Adelson](#).

It was Bolton who [persuaded Trump](#) to commit to specific language pledging to pull out of the JCPOA if Congress and America's European allies did not go along with demands for major changes that were clearly calculated to ensure the deal would fall apart.

Although Bolton was passed over for the job of secretary of state, he now appears to have had the inside track for national security advisor. [Trump met with Bolton on March 6](#) and told him, "We need you here, John," according to a Bolton associate. Bolton said he would only take secretary of state or national security advisor, whereupon Trump promised, "I'll call you really soon." Trump then replaced Secretary of State Rex Tillerson with former CIA director Mike Pompeo, after which White House sources [leaked to the media](#) Trump's

intention to replace H.R. McMaster within a matter of weeks.

The only other possible candidate for the position [mentioned in media accounts](#) is Keith Kellogg, a retired lieutenant general who was acting national security advisor after General Michael Flynn was ousted in February 2017.

Bolton's high-profile advocacy of war with Iran is well known. What is not at all well known is that, when he was under secretary of state for arms control and international security, he executed a complex and devious strategy aimed at creating the justification for a U.S. attack on Iran. Bolton sought to convict the Islamic Republic in the court of international public opinion of having a covert nuclear weapons program using a combination of diplomatic pressure, crude propaganda, and fabricated evidence.

Despite the fact that Bolton was technically under the supervision of Secretary of State Colin Powell, his actual boss in devising and carrying out that strategy was Vice President Dick Cheney. Bolton was also the administration's main point of contact with the Israeli government, and with Cheney's backing, he was able to [flout normal State Department rules](#) by taking a series of trips to Israel in 2003 and 2004 without having the required clearance from the State Department's Bureau for Near Eastern Affairs.

Thus, at the very moment that Powell was saying administration policy was not to attack Iran, Bolton was working with the Israelis to lay the groundwork for just such a war. During a February 2003 visit, Bolton [assured Israeli officials in private meetings](#) that he had no doubt the United States would attack Iraq, and that after taking down Saddam, it would deal with Iran, too, as well as Syria.

During multiple trips to Israel, Bolton had [unannounced meetings, including with the head of Mossad](#), Meir Dagan, without the usual reporting cable to the secretary of state and other relevant offices. Judging from that report on an early Bolton visit, those meetings clearly dealt with a joint strategy on how to bring about political conditions for an eventual U.S. strike against Iran.

Mossad played a very aggressive role in influencing world opinion on the Iranian nuclear program. In the summer of 2003, according to journalists Douglas Frantz and Catherine Collins in their book [The Nuclear Jihadist](#), Meir Dagan created a new Mossad office tasked with briefing the world's press on alleged Iranian efforts to achieve a nuclear weapons capability. The new unit's responsibilities included circulating documents from inside Iran as well from outside, according to Frantz and Collins.

Bolton's role in a joint U.S.-Israeli strategy, as he [outlines in his own 2007 memoir](#), was to ensure that the Iran nuclear issue would be moved out of the International Atomic Energy Agency and into the United Nations Security Council. He was determined to prevent IAEA director general Mohamed ElBaradei from reaching an agreement with Iran that would make it more difficult for the Bush administration to demonize Tehran as posing a nuclear weapons threat. Bolton began accusing Iran of having a covert nuclear weapons program in mid-2003, but encountered resistance not only from ElBaradei and non-aligned states, but from Britain, France, and Germany as well.

Bolton's strategy was based on the claim that Iran was hiding its military nuclear program from the IAEA, and in early 2004, he came up with a dramatic propaganda ploy: he sent a set of satellite images to the IAEA showing sites at the Iranian military reservation at Parchin

that he claimed were being used for tests to simulate nuclear weapons. Bolton demanded that the IAEA request access to inspect those sites and leaked his demand to the Associated Press in September 2004. In fact, the satellite images showed nothing more than bunkers and buildings for conventional explosives testing.

Bolton was apparently hoping the Iranian military would not agree to any IAEA inspections based on such bogus claims, thus playing into his propaganda theme of Iran's "intransigence" in refusing to answer questions about its nuclear program. But in 2005 Iran allowed the inspectors into those sites and even let them choose several more sites to inspect. The inspectors found no evidence of any nuclear-related activities.

The U.S.-Israeli strategy would later hit the jackpot, however, when a large cache of documents supposedly from a covert source within Iran's nuclear weapons program surfaced in autumn 2004. The documents, allegedly found on the laptop computer of one of the participants, included technical drawings of a series of efforts to redesign Iran's Shahab-3 missile to carry what appeared to be a nuclear weapon.

But the whole story of the so-called "laptop documents" was a fabrication. In 2013, a former senior German official [revealed the true story](#) to this writer: the documents had been given to German intelligence by the Mujahedin E Khalq, the anti-Iran armed group that was well known to have been used by Mossad to "launder" information the Israelis did not want attributed to themselves. Furthermore, the drawings showing the redesign that were cited as proof of a nuclear weapons program were clearly done by someone who didn't know that Iran [had already abandoned the Shahab-3's nose cone](#) for an entirely different design.

Mossad had clearly been working on those documents in 2003 and 2004 when Bolton was meeting with Meir Dagan. Whether Bolton knew the Israelis were preparing fake documents or not, it was the Israeli contribution towards establishing the political basis for an American attack on Iran for which he was the point man. Bolton reveals in his memoirs that this Cheney-directed strategy took its cues from the Israelis, who told Bolton that the Iranians were getting close to "the point of no return." That was point, Bolton wrote, at which "we could not stop their progress without using force."

Cheney and Bolton based their war strategy on the premise that the U.S. military would be able to consolidate control over Iraq quickly. Instead the U.S. occupation bogged down and never fully recovered. Cheney proposed taking advantage of a high-casualty event in Iraq that could be blamed on Iran to [attack an IRGC base in Iran in the summer of 2007](#). But the risk that pro-Iranian Shiite militias in Iraq would retaliate against U.S. troops was a key argument against the proposal.

The Pentagon and the Joint Chiefs of Staff were also well aware that Iran had the capability to retaliate directly against U.S. forces in the region, including against warships in the Strait of Hormuz. They had no patience for Cheney's wild ideas about more war.

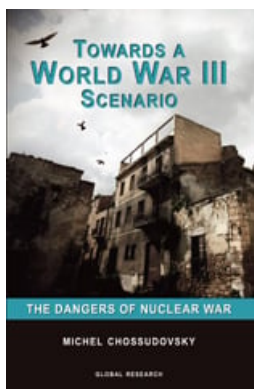
That Pentagon caution remains unchanged. But two minds in the White House unhinged from reality could challenge that wariness—and push the United States closer towards a dangerous war with Iran.

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author of [Manufactured Crisis: The Untold Story of the Iran Nuclear Scare](#). Follow him on Twitter [@GarethPorter](#).

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[“Towards a World War III Scenario: The Dangers of Nuclear War”](#)

by Michel Chossudovsky

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[Michel Chossudovsky](#) is Professor of Economics at the University of Ottawa and Director of the Centre for Research on Globalization (CRG), which hosts the critically acclaimed website www.globalresearch.ca. He is a contributor to the Encyclopedia Britannica. His writings have been translated into more than 20 languages.

Reviews

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Michel Chossudovsky exposes the insanity of our privatized war machine. Iran is being targeted with nuclear weapons as part of a war agenda built on distortions and lies for the purpose of private profit. The real aims are oil, financial hegemony and global control. The price could be nuclear holocaust. When weapons become the hottest export of the world’s only superpower, and diplomats work as salesmen for the defense industry, the whole world is recklessly endangered. If we must have a military, it belongs entirely in the public sector. No one should profit from mass death and destruction.

–Ellen Brown, author of ‘Web of Debt’ and president of the Public Banking Institute



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