
Documentation

Senate Committee Rakes Bolton Over the Coals

Following are excerpts from the May 12 debate and vote in the U.S. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, on the nomination of John Bolton to be U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations.

Sen. George V. Voinovich (R-Ohio)

Since our last meeting on this subject, I have pored over hundreds of pages of testimony, have spoken to dozens or so of individuals regarding their experiences, interactions and thoughts about John Bolton. . . .

After great thought and consideration, I have based my decision on what I think is the bigger picture. . . .

It was not long ago when America's love of freedom was a force of inspiration to the world and America was admired for its democracy, generosity, and its willingness to help others in need of protection.

Today, the United States is criticized for what the world calls arrogance, unilateralism, and for failing to listen and to seek the support of its friends and allies. There has been a drastic change in the attitude of our friends and allies in such organizations as the United Nations and NATO and in the

countries of leaders that we need to rely upon for help. . . .

It troubles me deeply that the U.S. is perceived this way in a world community, because the United States will face a steeper challenge in achieving its objectives without their support. We will face more difficulties in conducting the war on terrorism, promoting peace and stability worldwide, and building democracies without the help from our friends to share the responsibilities, leadership and costs. To achieve these objectives, public diplomacy must once again be of high importance. If we cannot win over the hearts and minds of the world community and work together as a team, our goals will be more difficult to achieve.

Additionally, we will be unable to reduce the burden on our own resources. The most important of these resources are the human resources, the lives of the men and women of our armed forces, who are leaving their families every day to serve their country overseas.

Just this last Tuesday we passed an \$82 billion supplemental bill for our operations in Afghanistan and Iraq. It is clear that the costs of this war are rising all the time, and they are not expected to go down any time soon.

There are not many allies standing up to join us in bearing the cost of these wars, particularly Iraq. We need the help of other countries to share the financial burden that is adding to our national debt and the human resource burden that our armed forces, National Guardsmen and contractors are bearing so heavily now, including the deaths of over 1,500 American servicemen and women.

And the key to this, I believe, is public diplomacy.

Mr. Chairman, I applaud the President and Secretary of State for understanding that public diplomacy is an important objective and beginning this new term with an emphasis on repairing relationships. . . . But what message are we sending to the world community when in the same breath we have sought to appoint an Ambassador to the United Nations who himself has been accused of being arrogant, of not listening to his friends, of acting unilaterally, of bullying those who do not have the ability to properly defend themselves?

These are the very characteristics that we're trying to dispel in the world community. . . .

It is my concern that the confirmation of John Bolton would send a contradictory and negative message to the world community about U.S. intentions. I'm afraid that his confirmation will tell the world that we're not dedicated to repairing our relationship or working as a team, but that we believe only someone with sharp elbows can deal properly with the international community. . . .

We have heard that Mr. Bolton has a reputation for straying off message on occasion. Ambassador Hubbard testified that the tone of Mr. Bolton's speech on North Korea hurt rather than helped efforts to achieve the President's objectives. According to several respectable sources, Mr. Bolton strayed off message too often and had to be called on the carpet quite often to be reprimanded.

In fairness, those sources said that once reprimanded, Mr. Bolton got back on track, but that he needs to be kept on a short leash. However, this leaves me a very uneasy feeling. Who is to say that Mr. Bolton will not continue to stray off message as Ambassador to the UN? . . .

When discussing all these concerns with Secretary Rice, John Bolton's propensity to get off message, his lack of interpersonal skills, his tendency to abuse others who disagree with him, I was informed by the Secretary of State that she understood all these things and in spite of them still feels that John Bolton is the best choice and that she would be in frequent communication with him and he would be closely supervised. My private thought at the time, and I should have expressed it to her, is: "Why in the world would you want to send somebody up to the UN that has to be supervised?" . . .

We have all witnessed the testimony and observations related to Mr. Bolton's interpersonal and management skills. I have concerns about Mr. Bolton's ability to inspire and lead a team so that it can be as effective as possible in completing the important task before him.

And I'm not the only one. I understand that 59 U.S. diplomats who served under administrations from both sides of the aisle sent a letter to the committee saying that Mr. Bolton's the wrong man for the job.

I want to note that the interview given by Colin Powell's chief of staff, Col. Lawrence Wilkerson, has said that Mr. Bolton would make an "abysmal" Ambassador, that he is "incapable of listening to people and taking into account their views."

Additionally, I wanted to note my concern that Colin Powell, the person whom Mr. Bolton answered to over the last four years, was conspicuously absent from a letter signed by former Secretaries of State recommending Mr. Bolton's confirmation. He's the one that had to deal with him on a day-to-day basis. He's the one that's more capable of commenting about whether or not he's got the ability to get the job done and his name was not on that letter. . . .

[T]here is no doubt that Mr. Bolton has serious deficiencies in the areas that are critical to be a good ambassador. As Carl Ford said, he is a kiss-up and kick-down leader who will not tolerate those who disagree with them and who goes out of his way to retaliate for their disagreement.

As Ambassador Hubbard said, he does not listen when an esteemed colleague offers suggested changes to temper language in a speech. . . .

Some others who have worked closely with Mr. Bolton stated he's an ideologue and fosters an atmosphere of intimidation. He does not tolerate disagreement. He does not tolerate dissent. . . .

Mr. Chairman, I have to say that after poring over the hundreds of pages of testimony and—you know, I wasn't here for those hearings, but I did my penance, I read all of it—I believe that John Bolton would have been fired if he'd worked for a major corporation. . . . It is my opinion that John

Bolton is the poster child of what someone in the diplomatic corps should not be. . . .

All things being equal, it is my proclivity to support the President's nominee. However, in this case, all things are not equal. It's a different world today than it was four years ago. . . .

After hours of deliberation, telephone calls, personal conversations, reading hundreds of pages of transcripts and asking for guidance from above, I have come to the determination that the United States can do better than John Bolton.

The world needs an Ambassador who's interested in encouraging other people's points of view and discouraging any atmosphere of intimidation.

The world needs an American Ambassador to the UN who will show that the United States has respect for other countries and intermediary organizations, that we are team players and consensus builders and promoters of symbiotic relationships.

And moving forward with the international community, we should remember the words of the great Scot poet who said, "Oh, that some great Power would give me the wisdom to see myself as other people see me."

That being said, Mr. Chairman, I'm not so arrogant to think that I should impose my judgment and perspective of the U.S. position in the world community on the rest of my colleagues. We owe it to the President to give Mr. Bolton an up-or-down vote on the floor of the United States Senate.

My hope is that on a bipartisan basis we can send Mr. Bolton's nomination to the floor without recommendation and let the Senate work its will.

Mr. Chairman, I really don't believe he's the best man that we can send to the United Nations.

Sen. Joseph R. Biden Jr. (D-Del.), Ranking Member

I feel obliged to lay out for the record one of my institutional concerns here.

I recognize that the State Department, the CIA, and AID have provided hundreds of pages of documents and declassified many of them. I don't minimize that. State and CIA have made government officials available for interview, and more than once. But this cooperation has been grudging, to say the least. . . .

Even after we narrowed our request at the urging of the State Department, only a relatively small amount of material that we narrowed the request for was provided. In rejecting the request, the Department proffered an extraordinary rationale. I think it's important, as a committee, we understand this.

They said, in rejecting some of the information we sought, "The department does not believe the requests to be specifically tied to the issues being deliberated by the committee."

As my Mom would say: "Who died and left them boss?" Think about it for a minute.

First, the Department is responding only to the request

endorsed by the majority. And second, the Executive branch is deciding for itself the issues which are relevant to this committee's review of a nomination. I believe this is a very important issue before the committee. I believe it's very important whether or not Mr. Bolton sought to stretch intelligence to say things in public statements the intelligence would not support and to keep going back to the intelligence community again and again to get answers he wants—not the answers the facts support.

Put another way, did he attempt to politicize the intelligence process for two former administration officials who testified?

That's why we requested this information.

I'm also concerned that the nominee may have given the committee some misleading testimony.

The material that was not provided would shed further light on both these concerns, and it relates to the preparation of congressional testimony on Syria, their weapons of mass destruction program. The preparation of this testimony occurred in the Summer of 2003. And remember, we already know from intelligence officials that there was an intense debate about what Mr. Bolton wanted to say and whether he should be able to say it. And this was a time there was open discussion about, Is Syria next? . . .

I'm even more concerned about the failure of the committee to receive information relating to Mr. Bolton's request for NSA information and to identify U.S. persons that he wanted to know in those intercepts.

On April 13th, Senator Dodd made the first request for this information. By a letter dated April 28th, Senator Lugar made a request for the information through the Intelligence Committee. . . . I understand that the chairman and vice chairman of the Intelligence Committee were briefed Tuesday by General Hayden. I understand that they were not given the identities of the U.S. persons that Mr. Bolton requested and received.

And I have no information on when or whether this committee or Senator Lugar or I will be given access to the same information given to the Intelligence Committee. . . .

I think it's unacceptable. We have a right to this information not only as members of this committee, but in our specific responsibility of exercising our advise and consent responsibility. . . .

After all the work we've done in the past decade to strengthen the role of this committee, it is a serious mistake, in my view, for all of us to acquiesce in the Administration's withholding of relevant information, whether they think it is relevant or not.

The integrity of the nominating process and our Constitutional role is being challenged, in my view. Article 2, Section 2 of the Constitution provides that the President "shall nominate and, by and with the advise and consent of the Senate, shall appoint ambassadors, other public ministers and counsels, judges of the Supreme Court, and all other officers of

the United States."

The failure of this Administration to cooperate with this committee and the rationale offered for this failure—that the Department does not believe these requests to be specifically tied to issues being deliberated by the committee—it has no Constitutional justification, and it does damage to the standing and ability of this committee and other committees to perform its function of oversight and advise and consent.

What makes this Administration think that it has the right to determine what the United States Senate needs in order to perform its Constitutional responsibility?

I do not work for the President of the United States of America. None of you work for the President of the United States of America. We are a co-equal branch—equally powerful and important, with a specifically assigned Constitutional responsibility that only we have a right to determine whether information is relevant or not—period.

With the doctrine of separation of powers, it's within our power, and ours alone, to decide what we think is relevant to our deliberations in the exercise of our responsibility. . . .

I think this is a matter of principle. . . .

And I think we've undermined our authority and we have shirked our constitutional responsibility. And I intend—even if tomorrow there is a vote in the Senate and they defeated John Bolton, I would continue to insist we're entitled to that information. . . .

Let me now turn to the nomination. . . . Based on the hearings we've held, and the interview we've conducted, and the documents we've examined, it is clear to me that John Bolton has engaged in four distinct patterns of conduct that should disqualify him from this job.

First, Mr. Bolton repeatedly sought the removal of intelligence analysts who disagreed with him: the removal of them, taking away their portfolios.

Second, in speeches and testimony Mr. Bolton repeatedly tried to stretch the intelligence to fit his views and repeatedly went back to the intelligence community to get the facts he wanted. Or as one witness said, "liticizing the process". . . . Third, in his relations with colleagues and subordinates in and out of government, Mr. Bolton repeatedly exhibited abusive behavior and intolerance of different views, as my friend from Ohio has said.

And fourth, Mr. Bolton repeatedly made misleading, disingenuous or nonresponsive statements to this committee.

But don't take my word for any of this. Look closely at the senior Republican—senior officials in this Republican Administration, who have testified before this committee and its joint staff. . . .

We have already lost a lot of credibility at home and abroad after the fiasco over the intelligence on Iraq, and Mr. Bolton is not the man to help us to rebuild it. He's the wrong choice. We can do a lot better. And I think an awful lot of our colleagues know that, notwithstanding the administration wanting him. . . .

Sen. Christopher J. Dodd (D-Conn.)

I can't think of another example in my 24 years on this committee, to see as many people of like political stripe, of common ideological and philosophical viewpoints, willing to come forward and say to us as a committee, "Please be careful about what you're doing." This is a rare moment, and our colleagues here need to take note of this.

And I think it's worthy of just describing who these people are and quickly going down the list. Stuart Cohen, acting chairman of the National Intelligence Council at the CIA; Alan Foley, former head of WINPAC at the CIA; John McLaughlin, the Deputy Director of Central Intelligence and Acting Director; Jamie Miscik, former Deputy Director of Intelligence; Thomas Hubbard, former U.S. Ambassador to South Korea; John Wolf, former Assistant Secretary of State for Nonproliferation; Christian Westermann, who we've talked about—the INR analyst; Tom Fingar, assistant secretary of state for intelligence and research; Beth Freesia [ph], immediate supervisor of Mr. Westermann; a man who has asked that his name not be made public here, but an attorney at the State Department who was involved in the issue involving Mr. Bolton's effort to move one of the employees there; William Taft, a legal advisor at the State Department; Fred Fleitz, the acting chief of staff for Mr. Bolton; Neil Silver, the INR office director supervising Mr. Westermann; Larry Wilkerson, former of staff to Secretary Powell; Robert Hutchins, former chairman of the National Intelligence Council.

These are all significant people, who have all said to us in their own words, one way or the other, "This is a bad choice".

If this were a question of a person's style, I think Senator Voinovich made a strong case that can be made about whether or not this kind of a style is what you want for someone serving as an ambassador to the United Nations.

But that's not my objection. . . . My concern is that we've just come through an incredible period in American history where major decisions were made about this nation's foreign policy based on the intelligence we are receiving. People are losing their lives every single day in a far-off land here, because there was a firm belief, based on the intelligence we had, that weapons of mass destruction existed.

Now, put aside whether or not you think it's right or wrong for us to be there today. The reason—the reason that we voted the way we did on that issue, was because it was the collective wisdom of the intelligence community that weapons of mass destruction existed. We now know that not to be the case.

Sen. Barbara Boxer (D-Calif.)

I am deeply disappointed that we have not gotten all the information we requested. And I agree with my leader on this committee, Senator Biden, that this is a matter of principle. . . .

And I will just say . . . that I am going to do all I can, to see that we get this information before this gets onto the floor. Because it's not right to cast a vote where you really don't have the full information.

Mr. Chairman, I think there are many reasons to oppose Mr. Bolton. . . . First, and to me the most important is the politicization of intelligence. This is the most important issue, when we see what phony and exaggerated intelligence can lead to. It can lead to war. We've seen it. It's happening every day.

It is tragic: thousands of deaths and injuries—1,600 deaths, plus. And in my state, we have about 25% of those deaths—people who were born in California or were activated from California. So we wear that heavily in our state.

So why on Earth would we want to hire someone who has shown he's willing to put political pressure on independent intelligence analysts? . . .

The strongest opposition to Mr. Bolton outside of members of this committee comes from the people from the Bush Administration. . . .

It is hard for me to understand why the President didn't simply say he's going to send down somebody else. I guess he wants a fight. I guess he's asking people to walk the line. And if that's where we're going, that's where we're going, because we're going to have a fight. If this comes to the floor, we're going to have a fight.