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John Bolton: An Effective Force for U.S. Interests at the United Nations

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As U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations, John Bolton has proven a forceful advocate of American interests, a powerful voice for U.N. reform, and a staunch defender of the cause of human rights. He has worked closely with Congress, testifying no less than six times before House and Senate committees. Bolton has been an outspoken critic of corruption, mismanagement, waste, and inefficiency at a world body that receives several billion dollars a year from U.S. taxpayers. He has shaken up an institution that has for decades resisted change and cast a revealing light on an elite U.N. establishment that has long thrived amid a culture of complacency and secrecy.

Due to Senate gridlock, President George W. Bush sent John Bolton to the United Nations in August 2005 as a recess appointment. The recess appointment expires when the new Congress convenes in January 2007, and the President has re-submitted Bolton for confirmation. The Senate Foreign Relations Committee is expected to vote on Bolton's nomination in early December.

An Outstanding Record at the U.N.

Bolton's record has been outstanding in three key areas: international security, human rights, and U.N. reform. He has dramatically raised the profile of issues from peacekeeping abuses to the need for increased transparency, accountability, and effectiveness at the United Nations. His commitment to both the advancement of U.S. interests and the cause of international freedom and security has not wavered.

International Security

The United States, along with the rest of the free world, must confront Iran and North Korea and defend Israel and its democracy while working to bring stability to the entire Middle East and Darfur. Should the president choose to renominate [Bolton], I cannot imagine a worse message to send to the terrorists—and to other nations deciding whether to engage in this effort—than to drag out a possible renomination process or even replace the person our president has entrusted to lead the nation at the United Nations at a time when we are working on these objectives.¹

—Sen. George Voinovich (R-OH)

Senator Voinovich, who did not support Bolton's original nomination in 2005, correctly points out that another drawn-out confirmation debate over John Bolton would only weaken America's position on the international stage at a time when the world is facing an array of crises, from Tehran's insistence on developing nuclear weapons to Pyongyang's increasingly aggressive stance. The United States does not need a weakened ambassador on the U.N. Security Council as it embarks on some of the toughest negotiations since the end of the Cold War.

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Bolton, who served as Under Secretary of State for Arms Control and International Security from 2001 to 2005, brings a wealth of experience in dealing with rogue regimes and the unique threat they pose to global security. He possesses a steady pair of hands at a time of great international tension. Bolton successfully led U.S. efforts to rally international support for U.N. Security Council Resolution 1718, which imposed military and economic sanctions on North Korea over its nuclear test in October.

On Iran, Bolton has played a key role in warning the international community of Tehran's continuing enrichment of uranium and has consistently pressured the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) to toughen its position on Iran's nuclear activities. Bolton was nominated by former Swedish deputy Prime Minister Per Ahlmark for the Nobel Peace Prize for his role in helping expose Iran's clandestine nuclear weapons program.²

Bolton is also a figure of authority on the Middle East, and with the growing threat posed by terrorist groups such as Hezbollah and Hamas, he is central to Washington's efforts to bring long-term peace and security to a region bedeviled by terrorism and totalitarianism.

Human Rights

As U.S. Ambassador, John Bolton has placed human rights firmly at the center of Washington's agenda at the U.N. He was instrumental in steering the Bush Administration away from joining the U.N.'s new Human Rights Council, set up this year

to replace the hugely discredited Commission on Human Rights, because that body was not a substantial improvement over its predecessor.

The Council's lack of membership criteria rendered it open to participation and manipulation by the world's worst human rights abusers. Tyrannical regimes such as Burma, Syria, Libya, Sudan, and Zimbabwe all voted in favor of establishing the Council, in the face of strong U.S. opposition. The brutal North Korean dictatorship also gave the Council its ringing endorsement. When Council elections were held in May, leading human rights abusers Algeria, China, Cuba, Pakistan, Russia, and Saudi Arabia were all elected.³

In a disheartening repeat of one of the old Commission's worst failings, the Human Rights Council decided to hold its first "Special Session" on Israel and adopted a one-sided resolution condemning that nation and ignoring the provocations of Palestinian armed groups.⁴ The Council convened its second "Special Session" on August 11, 2006, during which it adopted a resolution—27 to 11 with 8 abstentions—that strongly condemned Israel for "violations of human rights and breaches of international humanitarian law in Lebanon" and again ignored provocations by Hezbollah.⁵ The Council convened its third "Special Session" on November 15—again on Israel.⁶

Meanwhile, the Council ignored ongoing state-sanctioned human rights abuses in Belarus, Burma, Cuba, China, Iran, Sudan, Uzbekistan, Zimbabwe, and other places. This brief, disappointing record vindicates the decision by the U.S.—supported by

1. George V. Voinovich, "Why I'll Vote for Bolton," *The Washington Post*, July 20, 2006, at www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/07/19/AR2006071901788.html
2. "All Eyes on Nobel Peace Possibilities," BBC News Online, October 12, 2006, at <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/5398780.stm>
3. For background, see Brett D. Schaefer and Nile Gardiner, Ph.D., "The Right Decision on the U.N. Human Rights Council," Heritage Foundation *WebMemo* No. 1031, April 6, 2006, at [www.heritage.org/Research/International Organizations/wm1031.cfm](http://www.heritage.org/Research/International%20Organizations/wm1031.cfm)
4. "First special session of the Human Rights Council, 5-6 July 2006," Human Rights Council, at www.ohchr.org/english/bodies/hrcouncil/specialsession/index.htm
5. "2nd Special session of the Human Rights Council, Geneva, 11 August 2006," Human Rights Council, at www.ohchr.org/english/bodies/hrcouncil/specialsession/2/index.htm
6. "3rd Special session on Israeli military incursions in Occupied Palestinian Territory, 15 November 2006," Human Rights Council, at www.ohchr.org/english/bodies/hrcouncil/specialsession/3/index.htm

Bolton—to adopt a wait-and-see attitude toward the Council before running for a seat.⁷

While campaigning for a higher human rights standard at the U.N., Bolton has also worked tirelessly to push for greater action by the U.N. Security Council and the international community over the genocide in the Darfur region of the Sudan, which has claimed over 200,000 lives. He has played a key role in Security Council negotiations, pressing for greater protection for refugees fleeing Sudanese-backed Janjaweed militias and for targeted sanctions against Sudanese officials implicated in the killing.

U.N. Reform

Well-publicized scandals, such as the Oil-for-Food and procurement scandals, and allegations of widespread sexual abuse by U.N. peacekeepers in the Congo have greatly undermined the standing of the United Nations in the eyes of the American people. In addition, the failure of the organization to address ongoing issues, such as genocide in Sudan and the pursuit of nuclear weapons by Iran, has caused immense damage to the U.N.'s reputation in the United States.

According to a March 2006 Gallup poll, 64 percent of Americans believed the United Nations was “doing a poor job,” the worst rating for the U.N. in its history. Just 30 percent had a positive image of the U.N.'s job performance.⁸

A poll by Luntz and Maslansky in September 2006 revealed considerable dissatisfaction with the performance and effectiveness of the U.N., with 75 percent believing that the U.N. is no longer “effective” and “needs to be held more accountable” and 71 percent believing that the U.N. “needs to be considerably reformed.” Only 26 percent believed America gets “good value for all the money we contribute to the United Nations every year,” and 71

percent supported cutting America's financial contribution to the U.N. According to the poll, 57 percent agreed that if “the U.N. cannot be reformed and made more effective, it should be scrapped altogether and a more effective international organization should take its place.”⁹

A Rasmussen Research poll in September 2006 found that 45 percent of Americans have an unfavorable opinion of the United Nations while 31 percent have a favorable opinion. According to Rasmussen, “Those numbers reflect an erosion of support for the world body in this country. Two years ago opinion on the United Nations was evenly divided—44% favorable and 42% unfavorable.”¹⁰

While most Americans see the United Nations as a potentially useful organization, they recognize that it is doing a poor job and want it to perform better. John Bolton has been at the forefront of U.S. efforts to reform the U.N. He has an intimate knowledge of the U.N. organization and its weaknesses. He understands the divisions and tactics of those opposed to change in the world body. Most importantly, he is not held captive by diplomatic niceties that are used to delay or water down reform efforts.

Bolton helped achieve General Assembly consensus on reforming the U.N. resource management and budget process, improving oversight, reviewing United Nations mandates, and reforming human resources management. He successfully led an effort to cap the U.N. budget at \$950 million, pending progress on U.N. reform. In part due to Bolton's efforts, the U.N. created an Ethics Office, mandated financial disclosure for U.N. officials, and increased resources for the Office of Internal Oversight Services.

In the face of strong opposition by the Group of 77 nations (G-77), Ambassador Bolton forged a 50-

7. Brett D. Schaefer, “The United Nations Human Rights Council: Repeating Past Mistakes,” Heritage Foundation, *Lecture* No. 964, September 19, 2006, at www.heritage.org/Research/WorldwideFreedom/hl964.cfm#_ftnref25.
8. “Americans' Ratings of United Nations Among Worst Ever,” *Gallup Poll News Service*, March 13, 2006.
9. Luntz and Maslansky Strategic Research, “Americans Grade the U.N.: “Get It Together or Get Out,” Survey concluding September 5, 2006, at www.hudson.org/files/publications/HudsonPoll_U.N.final.pdf.
10. Rasmussen Reports, “Just 31% Have Favorable Opinion of U.N.,” September 27, 2006, at www.rasmussenreports.com/2006/September%20Dailies/UnitedNations.htm.

member coalition (representing 87 percent of the U.N. regular budget) to advance management reform. Nonetheless, G-77 opposition ultimately succeeded in delaying and blocking the reform effort,¹¹ with the General Assembly eventually approving a U.N. budget beyond the \$950 million cap.¹²

Resistance to reform inside the U.N. Secretariat and among many U.N. member states remains firmly entrenched.¹³ The few reform successes that have been achieved are, to a significant degree, the result of Ambassador Bolton's efforts.

Support for Bolton's Record

The debate in the Senate is expected to be ferocious, with strong partisan opposition likely. While emotions will undoubtedly run high, Bolton should be judged on his track record and his commitment to ensuring that U.S. interests are powerfully advanced at the United Nations. Positive testimonials of Bolton's performance abound, even among his critics:

- Senator George Voinovich, who opposed the Bolton nomination last June, has expressed his support for the U.S. Ambassador based on his performance over the past year.¹⁴ In a recent opinion editorial, Voinovich noted, "My observations are that while Bolton is not perfect he has demonstrated his ability, especially in recent months, to work with others and follow the president's lead by working multilaterally."

- Bolton has also won the grudging respect of other U.N. ambassadors. The Romanian Ambassador to the U.N. acknowledged to *The Los Angeles Times* that "[Bolton] is having a definite impact ... Others wish they could do things the same way," and the Algerian Ambassador observed that "[Bolton] has an agenda, and he's pursuing it with a conviction that is uncommon here...."¹⁵
- Even the *New York Times*, which opposed Bolton's nomination last year, reluctantly acknowledged earlier this year that "Bolton has strongly supported reform at the United Nations. He has rightly insisted that crucial reforms should not be picked apart or watered down into meaninglessness. And he is right now to insist that there can be no yielding on the core point of shifting basic management authority from the General Assembly to the secretary general."¹⁶

Conclusion

During his time at the U.N., John Bolton has been a hugely valuable asset to U.S. foreign policy and has proven his critics wrong. Bolton may not be the most popular figure at the United Nations, but he is greatly respected and viewed by both friend and foe as a formidable advocate for U.S. interests. U.S. participation at the United Nations is not about winning popularity contests or engaging in feel-good, back-slapping exercises. It is about steadfast leadership and the advancement of clear

11. Only incremental progress has been made toward reform objectives since this vote, largely limited to uncontroversial measures such as replacing the information technology system, establishing a Chief Information Technology Officer, and giving very limited discretion to the Secretary-General to shift budget resources. See Brett D. Schaefer, "A Progress Report on U.N. Reform," Heritage Foundation *Backgrounder* No. 1937, May 19, 2006, at www.heritage.org/Research/InternationalOrganizations/bg1937.cfm.

12. While the U.S. did not vote against the resolution, it disassociated itself from the consensus position. United Nations General Assembly, Department of Public Information, "General Assembly Lifts Spending Cap, Allowing United Nations Operations to Continue for Remainder of 2006, 2007," GA/10480, June 30, 2006, at www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2006/ga10480.doc.htm. "Statement by John R. Bolton, Permanent U.S. Representative to the United Nations In Explanation of Position On Program Budget for the Biennium 2006-2007 Document A/C.5/60/L.44," U.S.U.N. Press Release #140 (06), June 28, 2006, at www.usunnewyork.usmission.gov/06_140.htm.

13. Brett D. Schaefer, "The Status of United Nations Reform," Heritage Foundation *Lecture* No. 966, October 3, 2006, at www.heritage.org/Research/InternationalOrganizations/hl966.cfm.

14. Voinovich, "Why I'll Vote for Bolton".

15. Maggie Farley, "U.N. Hit By A Bolt From The Right," *Los Angeles Times*, December 23, 2005.

16. "Making The U.N. Work," *The New York Times*, April 25, 2006, at www.ihf.com/articles/2006/04/25/opinion/edun.php

principles and ideals. It is in the U.S. national interest to have a United Nations that is free of corruption, fraud, and mismanagement. And it is in the national interest to have a world body that actually stands for human rights, rejects terrorism, and advances rather than hinders international security.

Bolton has not been afraid to speak his mind and upset the status quo. Nor has he been unwilling to call a dictator a dictator, expose the rampant hypocrisy of the U.N.'s human rights apparatus, or condemn the actions of dangerous rogue regimes. Effective diplomacy requires forceful leadership and the willingness to back up tough words with action. As former British Prime Minister Margaret

Thatcher observed in a letter of support for John Bolton, "A capacity for straight talking rather than peddling half-truths is a strength and not a disadvantage in diplomacy. In the case of a great power like America, it is essential that people know where you stand and assume you know what you say."

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