

# John Bolton: Forgotten, But Not Gone

By John Isaacs | September 27, 2006

John Bolton's renomination as the U.S. ambassador to the United Nations appears moribund as Congress finishes its final session before the November election. Having received his UN post from President George W. Bush against congressional will in August 2005, Bolton's appointment is set to expire in January 2007, causing Bush to renominate his man in July—an effort met with bipartisan resistance.

The most significant roadblock to Bolton's confirmation remains the opposition from Democrats and moderate Sen. Lincoln Chafee (R-RI) on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, which approves all diplomatic nominations and has declined to hold a vote on the Bolton bid. But a congressional lame duck session in late fall could provide a last-gasp opportunity for Bolton to emerge as a phoenix from the ashes.

In early September, it was Chafee who put the brakes on Bolton's nomination, just as the Foreign Relations Committee appeared to be on the cusp of approving it. Chafee, caught in a squeeze between a conservative challenger on the right (in a September 12 primary) and a liberal Democrat on the left (in the forthcoming November general election), decided his best course of action was to avoid any vote at all.

The Bush administration, which strongly backed Chafee in the primary against his conservative challenger on the grounds that only Chafee could retain this key seat for the GOP in strongly Democratic Rhode Island, hoped for quick payback after Chafee won the primary. It was reported that Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice phoned Chafee to plead for his vote, but the senator demurred. Chafee

remains in a very tough fight for reelection against State Attorney General Sheldon Whitehouse, and he is not inclined to provide his Democratic opponent with fodder for an attack.

Despite Chafee's refusal to give a "yes" vote, the nomination may get through. When Congress recesses at the end of September, it will have completed very few of the crucial appropriations bills that fund the government. While there is bipartisan distaste for lame duck sessions—which are held after the November elections and include losing or retiring members who will not be in the next Congress—it is unavoidable in 2006. It is unclear whether the lame duck session will be brief and painless or long and agonizing—or whether senators will have an appetite for another bruising fight over John Bolton.

The John Bolton fight began in 2005, when Bush first nominated him to be the UN ambassador, in part because incoming Secretary of State Rice was disinclined to accept Bolton, then the undersecretary of state for arms control and international security, as a high-level deputy in Washington. Better, it seemed, if Bolton were exiled to New York where he could do less damage.

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But Democrats refused to join in the coronation, with opposition led by ranking Sen. Joseph Biden (D-DE) and Sen. Chris Dodd (D-CT). There were extraordinary hearings in which Bolton was excoriated by some who worked with him. According to testimony from a number of witnesses, Bolton was a rogue elephant in the State Department, to put it mildly. His personal foreign policy did not always square with the official State Department position. Moreover, he hectored, bullied, and tried to get fired people with whom he disagreed. Blunt-speaking Bolton was not cut out for a position of delicate diplomacy, in the opinion of many of his critics.

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The Democratic senators' passionate opposition to Bolton registered with Republican Sen. George Voinovich of Ohio, who first helped postpone a Foreign Relations Committee vote and then joined with most Democrats in a filibuster to prevent a vote on the nomination. The Senate twice rejected Bolton, so Bush named him as ambassador through a recess appointment while Congress was away.

In August 2006, Bush renominated Bolton. Two events had intervened to persuade the Bush

administration to run the Bolton nomination up the flag pole a second time.

First was the brutal conflict in July between Israel and Hezbollah, fought in the skies and on land in Lebanon. While many Israelis questioned their government's strategy and its failure to prevail, and while many in the rest of the world condemned Israel's aggressive military action as an overreaction to a genuine provocation, neoconservatives saw Israel's stance as a key part of the global war on terrorism. Ambassador Bolton, who held up UN action to stop the conflict until Israel had completed its military campaign, was hailed by the American far right.

Second, Voinovich, who was so disgusted with the nominee in 2005, suddenly had a change of heart. He penned a July 20, 2006 *Washington Post* op-ed in which he made his about-face public, arguing that in the midst of America's battle against worldwide terrorism, it would be unfortunate for Bolton to be replaced. He said that Bolton's track record at the United Nations showed his ability to work with others, including American allies.

Neoconservatives who had strongly promoted the 2005 Bolton nomination swung back into action. On July 26, more than 50 defense and foreign policy conservatives signed a letter circulated by the Center for Security Policy's Frank Gaffney to Foreign Relations Chairman Sen. Richard Lugar (R-IN), urging approval for the nomination. Signed by such luminaries on the right as former Secretary of State George Shultz, former CIA Director James Woolsey, former Pentagon official Richard Perle, and former Pentagon comptroller Dov Zakheim, the letter

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lauded Bolton's record over the past 12 months at the United Nations.

Gaffney and the Center for Security Policy also ran television ads in Rhode Island and Nebraska to pressure Chafee and Sen. Chuck Hagel (R-NB). Chafee remained unmoved; Hagel, as he frequently does, followed up skeptical words about Bolton with a decision to vote "yes" on the nomination. One is reminded of the words of the Nebraska Democratic Party chairman: Chuck Hagel roars like a lion on the television talk shows and votes like a lamb on the Senate floor.

Other leaders on the right joined in. Christopher DeMuth, president of the American Enterprise Institute, and Herbert London, president of the Hudson Institute, jointly penned a September 7, 2006 *Washington Times* op-ed arguing that the United Nations needs John Bolton.

American Jewish organizations joined the Bolton love-fest. Bolton's tough pro-Israel rhetoric during the conflict in Lebanon proved a strong tonic. The American Jewish Committee, which generally refrains from getting into nomination fights, sent a letter to the Senate urging a "yes" vote. The American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), the powerful pro-Israel lobbying group, added its voice for Bolton. An umbrella group called the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations agreed unanimously that John Bolton was their man.

The renewed pressure had some effect. New York's two Democratic senators, Charles Schumer and Hillary Clinton, sounded less than positive that they would again vote to uphold a

filibuster. A small leak in the dike from the defection of two New York liberals could have led to breaking of the dam of anti-Bolton opposition. However, Senate Democratic Leader Harry Reid of Nevada apparently was successful in a campaign to persuade Democrats from announcing any public opinion until further developments.

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The anti-Bolton coalition, including groups of organizations and individuals who opposed Bolton as a dangerous ideologue, have kept up a drumbeat of criticism. The efforts were spearheaded by Citizens for Global Solutions and the Open Society Policy Center. The groups pointed out that in dealing with the crises over Iran, North Korea, Iraq, and Darfur, Bolton was a failure. Not only that, but he sabotaged a year and a half of negotiations on UN organizational reforms by introducing hundreds of last-minute amendments. His efforts to create what he called a more effective Human Rights Council were counterproductive.

A July 23 *New York Times* article that documented Bolton's apparent impact on the UN community ran contrary to the arguments made by Bolton supporters that he is an alliance builder. The story quoted (anonymously, of course)

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numerous diplomats of allied countries that expressed revulsion with Bolton's go-it-alone style. The article reported that "many diplomats say they see Mr. Bolton as a stand-in for the arrogance of the administration itself."

Yet opposition to the Bolton renomination could well have been run over, had Senator Chafee not stayed firm. There is still the possibility that Congress will attempt to bring the nomination up for a new vote in a lame duck session—or Bush could give Bolton a second recess appointment in January. But this is

unlikely, since legally, Bolton could not receive a salary for this second appointment and perhaps would be barred from using official resources for his job. While the thought of John Bolton selling apples on New York City streets to earn money is an amusing fantasy, it is more likely that Bolton will return to the think-tank world, where he can hurl his thunderbolts at his enemies, domestic and international.

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