

Republican and Democratic Opposition Blocks Bolton in Senate Committee

by Edward Spannaus

Insisting that the Senate must confirm his nominee John Bolton as UN Ambassador, an obstinate President Bush urged the Senate on April 21 “to put politics aside.” The President should be careful what he wishes for: It is precisely because one Republican Senator did “put politics aside” and follow his conscience, that “serial abuser” John Bolton’s nomination is in trouble. Other Republicans also are indicating their willingness to put partisanship aside, and to consider the Bolton nomination on its merits, or lack thereof—which portends a further weakening of the lame-duck President.

It wasn’t Democrats who blocked the Senate Foreign Relations Committee from sending the Bolton nomination to the Senate floor on April 19; they didn’t have the votes. It was Republicans, namely Sen. George Voinovich of Ohio, with the tacit backing of Chuck Hagel of Nebraska and Lincoln Chafee of Rhode Island. Likewise, some of the most damaging evidence against Bolton, has also come from Republican appointees in the Bush Administration.

And now, as a result of what happened in the committee on April 19, for the next three weeks, Washington will be the center of a pitched battle over the continuing investigation into how the neo-con madman John Bolton tried to “cook” intelligence on the so-called “axis of evil” countries, in service of Vice President Dick Cheney’s perpetual war doctrine. Committee investigators will be following up allegations that Bolton repeatedly had to be corrected in his descriptions of the weapons programs of North Korea, Iraq, Iran, and Cuba; that he harassed and abused lower-level government employees who tried to tell the truth in the face of Bolton’s distortions; and that he attempted to access National Security Agency electronic intercepts of conversations by U.S. officials, for reasons still unknown.

Lugar Blocks Discussion

At the beginning of the Foreign Relations Committee session on April 19, it looked as if partisan politics would hold sway. Committee Chairman Richard Lugar (R-Ind.)—acting as if he had a gun to his head—came into the session determined to ram a vote through, and he seemed to be confident that he had the votes to do so. “We weren’t born yesterday,” Lugar said crassly. “The Republicans want to vote for John Bolton, and there are ten Republicans here.”

Early in the meeting, Sen. Joe Biden (N.J.), the ranking Democrat on the committee, made a motion to go into closed

session, in order to hear new evidence against Bolton, explaining that it would not be fair to the witnesses who have come forward to “out” them in public.

Lugar, acting uncharacteristically rudely, proceeded immediately to force a vote on Biden’s motion, without permitting any discussion. Democrats were interrupting and shouting “Point of Order,” and “stunning!”—to no avail. “This is the first time in this committee I’ve ever seen this,” Sen. John Kerry (Mass.) exclaimed.

After Biden’s motion was voted down on a straight party-line vote, 10-8, Sen. Barbara Boxer (D-Calif.) said that it was “shocking” that the committee could not even have discussion on Biden’s motion, and pointed out that the American people don’t like the abuse of power. Biden asked: “Is there a pattern here?”—clearly raising the comparison to Majority Leader Tom DeLay’s (R-Tex.) dictatorial tactics in the House of Representatives. Later, Sen. Paul Sarbanes (D-Md.) asked why it was that Lugar was throwing “any semblance of fairness, and the Committee rules, out the window.”

‘This Ought To Be Indictable’

Sen. Chris Dodd (D-Conn), in a powerful presentation to the committee, first acknowledged that “it’s rare indeed for me to express an objection to a nominee.” Dodd explained that his opposition is based on what Bolton “has done to the integrity of U.S. intelligence,” by trying to have two analysts fired because they disagreed with him. He pointed out that then-Secretary of State Colin Powell’s chief of staff, Lawrence Wilkerson, had told the *New York Times* that Bolton “is incapable of listening to people and taking into account their views,” and had declared that Bolton “would be an abysmal ambassador.”

Using a State Department organizational chart projected onto a large screen, Dodd recounted how Bolton had gone down five layers of the bureaucracy, and outside his own line of authority, to harangue and threaten State Department intelligence analyst Christian Westermann, who had questioned Bolton’s statements about Cuba. “This ought to be indictable,” Dodd proclaimed. “I’m amazed it’s not a crime . . . but instead we promote him.”

Dodd said that Committee members are now aware of five occasions on which Bolton tried to get analysts fired, and there are other cases in which he harassed and threatened

government employees.

Biden also gave an impassioned presentation of the case against Bolton. He pointed out that in the 1994 incident in Kyrgyzstan, Bolton told colleagues of USAID contractor Melody Townsel, that Townsel had stolen government funds and was going to be indicted; Bolton was lying. Biden challenged Lugar on Bolton's behavior: "Would you even hire a staff member who did that?"

Biden and others repeatedly identified instances in which Bolton had lied while under oath, in his testimony to the Committee. And while Bolton's abusive treatment of lower-level government employees was a significant point in the arguments, the overriding issue was that Bolton's threatening behavior was most egregious when it pertained to his efforts to stifle any intelligence assessments which contradicted or undermined his drive to distort intelligence to serve his political objectives.

(*EIR* was advised by a former high-level State Department source that Bolton, and his top assistant in 2002, David Wurmser, were especially keen to sabotage the work of the Department's Bureau of Intelligence and Research (INR), which was the only intelligence agency to dispute the claims that that Iraq had reconstituted its nuclear weapons program, in the 2002 National Intelligence Estimate on Iraq.)

At one point, Senator Kerry, in summary fashion, identified four serious patterns of Bolton's conduct: 1) retaliation against government employees; 2) manipulation of intelligence; 3) abuse of people who got in the way of his doing either of the above; and 4) his credibility. After going through a number of examples, Kerry concluded that Bolton "didn't tell the truth to this committee."

That other Republicans didn't respond to the clear evidence that Bolton had perjured himself, can only reflect the intense pressure coming from the White House and the Senate Republican leadership—all of which is personified in Dick Cheney, widely regarded as Bolton's primary sponsor and backer within the Administration.

Cheney was quoted in the *Los Angeles Times* in March 2004 asserting that "John Bolton deserves 'any job he wants.'" Cheney's enthusiasm is not surprising. When Bolton is not serving in a government post, he holds a number of positions to which he returns between government jobs: a director of the Project on a New American Century (PNAC), the imperial dream factory for the neo-cons; Board of Advisors of the Likud-aligned Jewish Institute for National Security Affairs (JINSA); vice president of the American Enterprise Institute (AEI); initiator of the anti-Russia New Atlantic Initiative; activist with the Federalist Society; and fellow at the Manhattan Institute.

'I've Heard Enough Today . . .'

Going into the April 19 committee meeting, all of the attention was on Republican Senators Hagel and Chafee, neither of whom spoke during most of the session. Finally, Hagel spoke up, said that he considered the charges against Bolton

to be serious, and acknowledged that Biden and Dodd "make good points." Hagel said that he intended to vote in favor of sending the nomination to the floor, but "that doesn't mean I'll support his nomination on the floor." Hagel said the charges against Bolton are "serious enough that they demand, or cry out, for further examination" by the full Senate.

Shortly after this, Senator Voinovich spoke for the first time; he apologized for having missed the committee hearings on the nomination the previous week, and then went on to state: "I've heard enough today that I don't feel comfortable voting for Mr. Bolton. I've heard enough to give me real concern."

Voinovich pointed out that he had put a hold on the nomination of Richard Holbrooke to be UN Ambassador during the Clinton Administration, because Holbrooke had been reported "to be a kind of a nasty guy, arrogant," and that he had then called Holbrooke in, talked to him and others, and that finally he took the hold off.

Voinovich said that he was impressed by the passion with which Biden and Dodd had presented their arguments, and he said that he was now convinced that "we all ought to get some more information on this man before we vote him out of the committee."

Next, a Joint Investigation

Voinovich's announcement appeared to stun those in the room. Lugar and then others acknowledged that they could not get the nomination voted out of committee, and began, in a confused manner, to discuss how to proceed. The general agreement, was that the committee will meet again in two or three weeks (now set for May 12), after the upcoming Senate recess, and may hear other witnesses, or may recall Bolton for further testimony. Meanwhile, as Biden got Lugar to agree, the committee staffs will conduct a joint investigation, interviewing witnesses and reviewing new evidence. This will make it much harder for those Republicans who still support Bolton, to accuse Democrats of making it all up, as the White House has been charging since the April 19 committee session.

After the session, Voinovich told reporters that he had been prepared to support Bolton when he came into the meeting, but he changed his mind after hearing the critique of Bolton from Senator Dodd. "The passion on the other side on this, I don't think is political," Voinovich said. "My conscience got to me."

Senator Chafee barely spoke during the two-hour meeting, except to ask Lugar at one point if he had any hesitation about moving the nomination forward, to which Lugar answered that he did not. After the hearing, according to wire reports, he said he was pleased that the vote was postponed. "I'm still listening," he said. Chafee also pointed out how unusual the session was. "I don't know if I've even seen, in a setting like this, a Senator changing his mind as a result of what other Senators said. The process worked. It's kind of refreshing."