

John Bolton and America's "Unelected Officials"

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Global Research, March 24, 2018

Region: [USA](#)

Theme: [History](#), [US NATO War Agenda](#)

This article reviews John Bolton's role at the United Nations. It was first published on December 12 2006

American democracy is truly a wonder, not because of its own self-inflated glory and rhetoric of its greatness, but because, contrary to that, of its shallowness and lack of democratic processes that put some of the most powerful people in the world into positions for which none of them have been elected. Further, they are mostly people who have not been elected by anyone at all for anything.

Congress is elected on a proportional basis, but with only two co-joined parties to choose from there is not much in the way of true representation of the wide diversity of the American population, the majority of whom have opted out of the electoral process. Rather, elections are mainly a contest between different interest groups (no surprise there) – business, religious sects, AIPAC, military procurements – more than it is a discussion of fundamental policies from a broad spectrum of political views. The Senate is elected state by state, part of the plan to balance the elements of government, operates in the same manner – two vaguely different parties striving for the political riches and power that elections bring. Another part of the government is the presidency, among other powers given is the role of Commander in Chief of the armed forces but that also is theoretically subject to Congress to make any declaration of war.

It is what I consider the fourth part of the government that is truly scary – although the features of elections in the U.S. that emphasizes money and power are scary enough – the unelected representatives that are called advisors, or are in unelected cabinet positions, or those ideologue zealots that are appointed to various sub-ministries within the government and government agencies. These unelected officials – Karl Rove, formerly John Aschcroft and Donald Rumsfeld, the new World Bank head Paul Wolfowitz, Dick Cheney (although it could be argued he was elected along with Bush, although the vote was not directly for him, but also under the electoral college system, no vote is directly for the president, after all we would not want any disruptive factions to enter the contest), Condaleeza Rice – among the best known names, along with some 'lesser' players such as Douglas Feith and Richard Perle – are the ones who set the basic agenda for both foreign policy and through such acts as the Patriot Act and the Homeland Security Act, set the agenda for much of the national scene as well. Not only are these people in power in the government, they also have to varying degrees an open door policy with transnational corporate business, and while some are not overtly part of the fundamentalist Christian right, their association with various religious groups supports the fundamentalist Armageddon bound intent of that now important Republican element.

Just as Paul Wolfowitz has expanded his horizons to the World Bank, John Bolton was appointed to the UN as the U.S. ambassador, ready to expand on the administration's

unilateralism and contempt for international law. In Bolton's case, he becomes the perfect fifth columnist, as he is very outspoken in his contempt for the United Nations and is very much against international negotiations and international treaties that impinge on the 'freedom' of the U.S. to act unilaterally. Another leopard who will not change his spots.

It is not that Bolton is actually against the United Nations, it is that he sees it as being used against the United States and needs reforming to become a tool of U.S. foreign policy rather than a tool wielded by the Third World to contain and control the U.S. In his own words, Bolton, while Senior Vice President of the American Enterprise Institute, affirmed the uniqueness of the American way, stating, "Scepticism about the United Nations is another aspect of what scholars have termed "American exceptionalism," the idea that the United States is, simply stated, different from other countries. I completely agree." From that he asserts that "the United Nations can be a useful instrument in the conduct of American foreign policy" but that "No one...should be under any illusions that American support for the United Nations as one of several options for implementing American foreign policy translates into unlimited support for the world organization"[1]

His contempt of the United Nations is also expressed in a similarly blunt manner in his contempt for international treaties. He opposed the UN trade regulations on small arms saying they would "abrogate the constitutional right to bear arms." His renouncement of Clinton's signature on the International Criminal Court Treaty was "the happiest moment in my government service." [2] Along with this moment of happiness he "almost gleefully pulled the United States out of negotiations on a protocol to the Biological Weapons Convention in late 2001 and he negotiated the U.S. withdrawal from the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty with Russia", allowing the U.S. to proceed with its ABM defences.[3] He scuttled the biological weapons ban, as well as "fiercely opposing" international agreements on landmines and child soldiers. Obviously, Bolton has been having some very successful moments of personal satisfaction in his quest for preserving the rights of that American exceptionalism, much to the detriment of the rest of the world and its citizens.

The current deputy-secretary general of the UN has dampened this happiness somewhat by recognizing that the U.S. is trying to manipulate the UN to its own advantage while ignoring its responsibilities - or more blatantly, denouncing them - to the international community and pursuing its own unilateralist position. Malloch Brown, in referring to U.S. actions concerning the UN, said,

"The prevailing practice of seeking to use the United Nations almost by stealth as a diplomatic tool while failing to stand up for it against its domestic critics is simply not sustainable. You will lose the United Nations one way or another." He said his remarks were "a warning about the serious consequences of a decades-long tendency by U.S. administrations of both parties to engage only fitfully with the United Nations." [4]

Anti-internationalism

One of the main thrusts of Bolton's argument against international treaties is that they are not truly laws, and because they are not truly laws, the U.S. does not have to abide by them, they serve only as guidelines that the U.S. can ignore if its purposes are not served. It is very difficult to argue with Bolton because his arguments are not based on sequential reasoning but are essentially self-contradictory and based on rhetoric lined up to sound good but effectively meaning little in practical terms. He also ignores practical applications

of ideas contrary to his and always seems to settle on the argument that America is right because America can ignore the international treaties because they hold all the power. Might is right.

He says,

“Treaties are law only for U.S. domestic purposes. In their international operation, treaties are simply political obligations.”[5]

This is a nonsensical statement, especially the first part. If a treaty is ignored internationally, why would it be a law for domestic purposes? Looked at another way, it would mean that international criminal law is okay if it suits the United States purposes to prosecute someone, but don't dare prosecute an American under any circumstances, which is exactly the line the U.S. takes with its international relations. It is self-serving meaningless rhetoric.

In an article in Foreign Affairs, he concludes his arguments with a blanket statement that “None of the international organizations that exist today could pass for accountable law-giving, law-interpreting, or law-enforcing bodies.”[6] Perhaps not by the strict rules of perfection, but no legal organization in the world is perfect, and in spite of American belief in its “transcendent perfection” and Bolton's acceptance of its exceptionalism, the American system is very far from being fully accountable, although it does its best at being fully enforceable, with, as stated before, a bare minimum of acceptance of socially responsible behaviour. Yes, these organizations and treaties are not perfect, but they are all steps in the right direction, leading towards a safer, non-violent, socially secure world. It is a long path and will not come easily, just as all movements towards democracy in the past have been struggles that have been ongoing for decades and centuries.

As for John Bolton's legacy, Brooke Lierman, the special assistant to the senior vice president for national security of the Center for American Progress, said after his role as guardian of the non-proliferation treaty, “At this point it is clear that the world Bolton has left us four years later is one that is more dangerous. He can only do more damage from a position of greater power.”[7] James Carroll writes in his history of the Pentagon, a personal history in relation to his father Lieutenant General Joseph F. Carroll, that “Bolton was the living icon of the two most dismaying facts of global politics today: nuclear arms control is dead; America killed it.”[8]

Nuclear non-proliferation

Before arriving at the United Nations, Bolton's main position in the Bush administration was as Undersecretary of State for arms control, non-proliferation and international security. This is perhaps the most laughable assignment within the administration, laughable in a scary absurd perspective. Bolton is very hawkish, consorts with the Israeli government, and has not had any military service, all of which fits him comfortably into the ‘guidelines’ for participation with the other neocons in the Bush administration. His title “has an Orwellian ring to it: Here's the undersecretary of state for disarmament who is pushing for a U.S. armed to its teeth,”[9] and “he is a committed unilateralist who opposes global arms treaties on principle.”[10] Bolton himself has said the U.S. should “Recognize obligations only when it's in our interest” and that the supporters of test ban treaties were “misguided

individuals following a timid and neo-pacifist line of thought.”[11]

When the United Nations was discussing world trade in small arms Bolton declared “that the United States intended to thwart any agreement that might constrict the right of its citizens to possess guns,”[12] which could have one wondering if he might state the same objections about nuclear arms, that the U.S. would not restrict any state having access to them if that might constrict their right to them as well. As with most of these hawkish proponents of nuclear first strike capability, there is a different set of rules for other states than for themselves – non-proliferation and arms control should by necessity start at home.

Others however escape the rules of the non-proliferation treaty (NPT). Bolton said that America “Was not interested in taking Israel to task for its continuing development of nuclear weapons because it was not a ‘threat’ to the United States.”[13] Quite the contrary, in the event that Israel uses non-conventional weapons (a pleasant euphemism for nuclear weapons) to attack another country, the U.S. position arriving from bilateral discussions on non-conventional weapons between Bush and Ariel Sharon, then Israeli Prime Minister, is that “Israel has the right to defend itself with its own forces.”[14] That it has not done so yet can probably be attributed to American pressure not to do so, as in the first Iraqi war in 1991, and in other instances because it would be a fully perceived irrational and ridiculous action against a nebulous enemy – terrorists – who really have no hard targets to aim for.

For Iran, however, “Israel is unlikely to ask the United States to approve on any attack on Iran,”[15] although if other actions of Israel are indicative of their strategy, the U.S. would probably be cognizant of the plans, if not the timing, well before hand, nor would it be surprising to find them actually involved in such planning. Former UN weapons inspector Scott Ritter indicates that Bolton,

“a decidedly split personality...has developed a strong relationship with Israel, one that had him undermine official U.S. policy...[and] with Israeli intelligence officials, again outside of official bureaucratic channels.”

He considers it “curious” that Bolton was assigned to the UN “unless the goal and objective was to undermine and/or discredit the U.N. process as a whole, thereby freeing up U.S.-centric unilateralism.” Bolton has acted not “on his own volition...but rather as part of a larger U.S. policy to force a confrontation with Iran,” a confrontation based integrally on Israeli desires.[16]

I will delve more into the nuclear issue shortly, including America’s own ignoring of one major component of the NPT, that of working towards reducing its own arsenal, but it is Bolton’s nefarious character that requires a bit more definition here first. When it comes to nuclear possibilities, including its extension to Armageddon, Bolton is one of its leading proponents and while he is a Lutheran, he fits in very well with the Christian right and their self-fulfilling prophecies of the end of times. This leads to the most frequently quoted statement about any of the American hawks in books, articles, and web sites. It is a comment that leaves no doubt that these officials are willing to use nuclear weapons as a means of sorting out the ‘good’ from the ‘evil’. It is Senator Jesse Helms describing him: “Bolton is the kind of man with whom I would want to stand at Armageddon, for what the Bible describes as the final battle between good and evil in this world.”[17] One wonders about the intelligence of appointing someone to an office for which they support opposite

views, as indicated by Sen. Joseph Biden who said,

“I have always voted against nominees who oppose the avowed purpose of the position for which they have been nominated.”[18]

Scott Ritter agrees fully, as “Bush could not have sent a stronger signal about his ultimate intentions than sending to the U.N. a man who had, throughout his career, openly mocked the world organization.”[19]

Bolton and Israel



Bolton’s support for Israel and from Israel is obvious. He has attended meetings with Sharon and his government. He is a former member of the Jewish Institute for National Security Affairs. He participates frequently in representations involving the American Israeli Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), along with Wolfowitz, and is now pursuing Syria as the next threat with weapons of mass destruction. AIPAC actively lobbies members of the Senate and Congress as well as distributing materials for public consumption, ending by asking the public to thank your members for supporting whatever legislation they see is good. In meetings with Israeli officials in 2003 concerning American actions in Iraq, Bolton said “It will be necessary to deal with threats from Syria, Iran, and North Korea afterward,” with Sharon replying that “the American action is of vital importance,” - which begs the question, vital to whom?[20]

Bolton does not speak of Palestine, neither as a problem that Israel has to deal with, nor as a people with their own proper aspirations for their own homeland. It leads to the obvious thought that Bolton’s (and most of the hawks) support for Israel extends from the Mediterranean in the west to the Jordan in the east, and from the Sinai in the south to the Golan in the north. Anything or anybody else does not even measure as an inconvenience, it is simply ‘conveniently’ ignored. The more and the longer it is ignored, the more and the longer Israel will be established in the occupied territories. While the U.S. occupies and ‘democratizes’ the Middle East countries, Israel will be more secure in its occupation, colonization, and settling of Palestine.

There is a further contradiction within Bolton’s definitions of laws and constitutional validity when his position on Israel is examined. He argues

“To have real law in a free society, there must be a framework (a constitution) that defines the government’s authority, thereby limiting it and preventing the exercise of arbitrary power.”[21]

His argument then has two parts: one, that a constitution limits the powers of a government; and two that without one there is no real law. So now juxtapose this anti-internationalist with his rabid support of Israel and his comments on constitutional government and multiple problems arise. First of all, Israel has no constitution, therefore it has no real law. Secondly, without a constitution there is little to restrict its arbitrary use of power. Finally there are no guarantees of “freedom of speech, freedom of religion or, most importantly, equality.”[22] Bolton’s arguments deserve no respect as they dissolve under his double standard acceptance of a non-democratic theocratic Jewish state in Israel that has no constitution while he rejects the same non-constitutional format for international organizations and treaties. But perhaps as a zealot he is fully aware of that and because his arguments carry little weight logically there is no dissonance within his own mind.

By Bolton’s arguments, the Jewish government of Israel can rule arbitrarily without constitutional limits on its use of power, something he sees as a danger in international institutions. And that, unfortunately, is exactly what Israel does, both internally with its resident Palestinian population, and ‘externally’ against the Palestinians in the Westbank and Gaza strip. Added to that, Israel “has never revoked a state of emergency that allows gross violations of human rights inside Israel.”[23] Again, it is hard to formulate an argument against an illogical non-coherent set of beliefs, but Bolton’s illogical presentation simply highlights the knowledge that Israel treats its internal Palestinian population as non-citizens, as the ‘other’, simply as residents who are excluded from the supposed democratic processes of the country. His elevation to the UN as the U.S. representative will benefit Israel in two policy areas: its nuclear policy, without a requirement for recognition of an international treaty that it holds in contempt and disdain; and its policy of exclusion of an indigenous group within a non-democratic theocratic government, an ethnocracy. With a Security Council Resolution presented to denounce the Israeli bombing of Beit Hanoun in the Gaza Strip, the U.S. applied their veto, calling the resolution “unbalanced” and “biased against Israel and politically motivated”.[24] Of course anything that goes against Israel or the U.S. would automatically be ‘biased’ and ‘unbalanced’ in Bolton’s peculiar manner of thinking. Although Bolton argues for constitutionality, he is quite happy to operate outside of it, a fully contradictory position.

Goodbye

Bolton is an ideologue who uses quick and catchy phrases that when looked at closely find no point of argument to support them. He has continually been a proponent of nuclear weapons, continually been a proponent of pre-emptive military action, and like many in the current administration, views it as an American right to act unilaterally to protect American ‘rights’ around the globe. This is the man that now represents the U.S. in the United Nations, and as with his role of demonizing the Nuclear Weapons Test Ban Treaty and ignoring the fundamentals of the NPT as they should be applied to the United States, he will do his best to manipulate the UN to act as an instrument of American foreign policy. If not, he will be able to walk away from it all without guilt or concern, fierce in his arrogance and conceit of American exceptionalism, and proceed with promoting whatever unilateral designs the U.S. has conceived for the rest of the world.

It appears now that Bolton is walking away from this position, probably to assume some form of ‘private’ life in a reconstituted neocon think-tank waiting for the next opportunity to revive itself with some future government. He is far too familiar with the bureaucracy and hallways of power to leave them behind if opportunity presented itself otherwise. Who will replace Bolton is likely irrelevant – someone less acerbic and egomaniacal, softer of speech

with a better modulated tone – as American policy underneath whatever rhetoric is presented is unlikely to change.

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This article was originally published on [Palestine Chronicle](#) in December 2006.

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Notes

[1] Bolton, John. "America's Skepticism About the United Nations"
<http://usinfo.state.gov/journals/itps/0597/ijpe/pj2bolt.htm>

[2] <http://rightweb.irc-online.org/profile/972>

[3] Bosco, David. "The World According to Bolton," Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists, July/August 2005 pp. 24-31 (vol. 61, no. 04). www.thebulletin.org/article.php?art_ofn=ja05bosco

[4]"U.N. rejects U.S. demand for retraction"
<http://www.upi.com/InternationalIntelligence/view.php?StoryID=20060607-013127-8199r>

[5] Bosco, *ibid.*

[6] Bolton, John. "The Global Prosecutors: Hunting War Criminals in the Name of Utopia", Foreign Affairs, January/February 1999.
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[8] Carroll, James. House of War – The Pentagon and the Disastrous Rise of American Power. Houghton Mifflin Company, N.Y. 2006. p. 501.

[9] Williams, Ian "Beware of Bolton" www.alternet.org/story/13256 . November 21, 2004.

[10] Kellner, Douglas. From 9/11 to Terror War, Rowman and Littlefield New, York 2003.

[11] Bolton cited in Williams, *ibid.*

[12] Johnson, Chalmers. The Sorrow of Empires Metropolitan Books New York, 2004.

[13] <http://lunaville.com/mt/archives/000358.html>

[14] Karpin, Michael. The Bomb in the Basement – How Israel Went Nuclear and What that Means for the World. Simon & Schuster, N.Y. 2006. p. 349.

[15] *Ibid*, p. 348

[16] Ritter, Scott. Target Iran – The Truth About the White House’s Plans for Regime Change. Nation Books, N.Y. 2006. p. 142-3.

[17] cited in almost every source that has any comment on the politics of John Bolton.

[18] Lierman, *ibid*.

[19] Ritter, *ibid* p. 168

[20] Raimondo, Justin “War is not in U.S. interest”
www.usatoday.com/news/opinion/editorials/2003-03-17-oppose_x.htm

[21] Bosco, *ibid*.

[22] Cook, Jonathan. Blood and Religion – The Unmasking of the Jewish and Democratic State. Pluto Press, Ann Arbor, MI. 2006. p. 17-18.

[23] *Ibid*, p. 18.

[24] Bolton, John. Cited in “U.S. veto of Gaza resolution criticised.” November 12, 2006.
<http://english.aljazeera.net/NR/exeres/1A32EA5C-7462-4EA0-B642-9363F23A9E79.htm>

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