

Bush imposes right-wing thug as ambassador to UN

The “recess appointment” of Bolton

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In both the thuggish character of the nominee and the arrogant method of his installation, George W. Bush’s August 1 “recess appointment” of John Bolton as the US ambassador to the United Nations exemplifies his administration’s contempt for democratic forms as well as world public opinion.

In announcing the appointment on the first Monday morning after Congress went on its five-week summer break, Bush declared Bolton “the right man for the job,” and charged that his nomination last March had not been put to a vote “because of partisan delaying tactics by a handful of senators.”

In reality, Bolton’s problems in the US Senate stemmed in large part from divisions within the Republican Party over the wisdom of appointing such a hardcore right-wing ideologue to the UN post.

The Senate Foreign Relations Committee failed to recommend his nomination to the full Senate because Republican Senator George Voinovich of Ohio refused to endorse him. Voinovich stated reasons of “conscience” in explaining his opposition to the president’s nominee.

Dissension within Republican ranks also precluded the Republicans from casting the opposition to Bolton as merely a partisan ploy and thereby mounting an effective campaign to force a speedy up or down vote.

As for the Senate Democrats, the recess appointment expresses the utter contempt the White House holds for the so-called opposition. Having allowed the administration to push through a major portion of its agenda before the Senate went on vacation—the reauthorization of the Patriot Act, the highway and energy bills, the CAFTA trade agreement, protection for gun manufacturers—the Democratic leadership is rewarded with a resounding kick in the teeth.

Senate minority leader Senator Harry Reid of Nevada, termed the appointment “the latest abuse of power by the Bush White House.” Senator Frank Lautenberg, a New Jersey Democrat, issued a statement saying, “even while the president preaches democracy around the world, he bends the rules and circumvents the will of Congress” in the US itself.

The decision to push ahead with installing Bolton at the UN demonstrates that the administration has no fear that it will face any real political repercussions, even as it is demanding that the Democrats acquiesce to placing the right-winger John Roberts on the US Supreme Court.

At a White House ceremony, Bolton made a brief statement declaring himself “profoundly honored, indeed, humbled by the confidence” shown by the president in his fitness for the post. One television commentator noted aptly that it was perhaps the only occasion in which Bolton’s name and humility have been spoken of in the same breath.

Bolton continued by vowing to “work tirelessly to carry out the agenda” of the administration. This agenda, based on US global unilateralism and militarism, is one that Bolton supports fervently. He is consequently an inveterate opponent of allowing international laws and institutions to impinge in any way on the predatory pursuit of US strategic interests.

His installation at the UN is welcomed by the Republican Party’s right-wing base, which fervently wishes for the international organization’s destruction.

Under the recess appointment, Bolton’s term would last only until the beginning of the next session of Congress in January 2007. At that time, the White House could resubmit his nomination. Nonetheless, he goes to the UN as a lame duck appointee, thoroughly discredited from the outset by his inability to win Senate confirmation.

It marks the first time in the nearly six decades since the founding of the UN that a US ambassador to the United Nations has been installed in this fashion. The method of recess appointment has been employed by past presidents largely for the purpose of appointing federal judges whose nominations have been snarled in procedural disputes in the Senate.

The Bush administration has repeatedly employed this device—circumventing normal constitutional processes and suppressing the Senate’s power of advice and consent—to push through nominees whose records do not bear public scrutiny. Moreover, it has done so not merely in the period separating the closing of one session of Congress and the opening of another, as was previously the case, but virtually any time that Congress breaks, even for the shortest period.

Thus, in January 2004, Bush named Federal District Judge Charles Pickering to the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals during a weeklong Senate break. Pickering’s nomination had twice previously been rejected by the Senate. A month later, the White House used the same tactic to place Alabama Attorney General William Pryor on another federal appeals court bench. Like Pickering, his nomination faced opposition because of his extreme right-wing views on matters ranging from civil rights to abortion.

While Pickering retired once his recess appointment expired with the beginning of the new Congress, Pryor was renominated. The Senate Democrats last month agreed to drop their opposition to his permanent appointment as part of a rotten compromise that purportedly forestalled the use of the so-called “nuclear option” abolishing the filibuster for judicial nominees.

Another recess appointment was that of Otto Reich in January 2002 as assistant secretary of state for the Western Hemisphere. Reich’s record included intimate involvement in the illegal “contra” war against Nicaragua under the Reagan administration as well as close ties to anti-Castro Cuban terrorists. Reich was one of Bolton’s closest allies within the State Department.

The appointment of Bolton by executive fiat came on the heels of revelations that indicated

he had committed perjury in responding to Senate questions on his nomination. The issue involved was directly related to the administration's use of phony intelligence to drag the country into the war of aggression in Iraq.

In a sworn statement to Congress after his nomination, Bolton stated that he had not been questioned or interviewed in any investigation over the last five years.

Last Thursday, however, the State Department issued a "clarification," revealing that Bolton indeed was interviewed by the department's acting inspector general in relation to the fraudulent intelligence that the Bush administration cited in claiming that the Iraqi regime was actively pursuing the production of nuclear weapons.

The joint State Department-Central Intelligence Agency probe was directed at determining how Washington reached the conclusion that Iraq was attempting to buy nuclear materials from the African country of Niger.

Some of the key documents used by the administration to make its case were exposed as forgeries.

Just hours after insisting that Bolton had answered a Senate questionnaire correctly when he claimed he had not been questioned by a grand jury or in any other investigation, a State Department spokesman was compelled to admit that he had testified in the Niger probe.

The State Department-CIA investigation has been run parallel to a criminal investigation into the leaking of the identity of covert CIA agent Valerie Plame to the media. The leak from within the Bush administration was carried out as an act of retaliation against Plame's husband, former US Ambassador Joseph Wilson, who was sent by the administration to investigate the reports of Iraqi uranium purchases in Niger. Wilson found no evidence of such activity and later publicly charged the administration with making false claims about a supposed Iraqi nuclear threat to justify the US invasion.

Matt Cooper, a *Time* magazine reporter who wrote a story naming Plame, has since testified before a grand jury in the case and identified Bush's senior adviser Karl Rove and vice presidential chief of staff Lewis "Scooter" Libby as unnamed sources for the story.

Bolton "didn't recall being interviewed by the State Department's inspector general" when he responded to the Senate questionnaire," a department spokesman claimed. "Therefore, his form, as submitted, was inaccurate," he added. "He will correct it."

The pretense that Bolton did not remember being questioned about the false intelligence concerning Niger and Iraq is preposterous. The issue was a major preoccupation of the administration when it organized the retaliation against Wilson and has remained one in the face of the ongoing probes.

Moreover, Bolton has been at the center of manufacturing phony intelligence to further the organization of US aggression.

Before joining the Bush administration, he was a director of the Project for a New American Century, which developed the plans for the military takeover of Iraq that the administration subsequently executed, using the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks as a pretext.

Within the State Department, he was known as a close ally—and considered by many as an

agent—of the neo-conservative leadership in the Pentagon which organized its own operation to bypass established intelligence sources and invent its own “facts” to justify the illegal war against Iraq.

Last Friday, 36 senators—35 Democrats and one independent—sent a letter to the White House pleading with Bush not to make a recess appointment of Bolton given the false testimony on the State Department investigation.

“Sending someone to the United Nations who has not been confirmed by the United States Senate and now who has admitted to not being truthful on a document so important that it requires a sworn affidavit is going to set our efforts back in many ways,” the letter said. It added, “Mr. Bolton’s excuse that he ‘didn’t recall being interviewed by the State Department’s inspector general’ is simply not believable.”

Meanwhile Republican Senator Lincoln Chafee from Rhode Island, who had previously wavered over the nomination, said that the revelation could force him to withdraw his support for Bolton. “There should be some explanation,” he told the press. “I would certainly want to give him a chance to defend the inaccuracy.” Chafee added that it would be a mistake for Bush to carry out the recess appointment. “The nomination is so controversial I think it deserves a Senate vote.”

For the Bush administration, however, the revelation was an even more compelling reason to ram through the nomination. With the questions surrounding the exposure of the former CIA agent reaching into the White House, Bush had no intention of allowing drawn out hearings on the issue.

Bolton has personally organized the same kind of operation as the one mounted by the White House and the Pentagon to manufacture the pretext for invading Iraq. In early 2002, he demanded that the intelligence agencies provide corroboration of his charge that Cuba was developing biological weapons that it could potentially share with “rogue states” or terrorists—precisely the false accusation that was used to justify the war against Iraq.

When career intelligence officers refused, Bolton exploded, subjecting them to personal diatribes and demanding that they be fired.

It was this behavior that led a senior State Department intelligence official to describe Bolton as a “serial abuser” and testify before the Senate earlier this year that he was the “quintessential kiss-up, kick-down sort of guy.”

Senate Democrats for the most part focused on the testimony as evidence that Bolton was unsuited for the UN post because he lacked a diplomatic “temperament,” rather than the obvious fact that he was a key player in the general conspiracy within the Bush administration to deceive the American people in order to carry out wars of aggression.

In the absence of any serious opposition to these methods within the Democratic Party or any section of the US establishment, Bolton will now take his post at the United Nations. A man who has said that “to grant any validity to international law” is a “big mistake,” and who described the day he presided over the repudiation of the treaty establishing the International Criminal Court as the “happiest moment” of his career will now serve as US imperialism’s ugly—and fitting—face to the world.

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