

Bolton Fight Opens Window On Intelligence-Rigging

by Edward Spannaus

A new window on the Cheney gang's "cooking of the books" on intelligence assessments—which has been largely covered up by all investigations to date—has unexpectedly been opened, with the fight over the nomination of John Bolton to become the U.S. Ambassador to the UN. Despite massive evidence to the contrary, the official conclusions of both the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, and the Silberman-Robb report on WMD intelligence, were that there was no evidence of intelligence analysts being pressured to produce assessments which would justify the drive to war in Iraq—even though such evidence was contained in the details of their own reports, which most people never bothered to read.

But now, the issue of the Administration's intelligence-rigging has burst into the open again, with extensive and irrefutable evidence being presented in dozens of interviews and statements from Administration officials in the State Department, CIA, and other sections of the intelligence community. According to a well-placed Washington intelligence source, the emergence of so many new witnesses represents an institutional move against the Administration's continued war drive.

With the Bolton nomination now moving to the Senate floor—minus any endorsement from the Senate Foreign Relations Committee—the stage is set for an all-out war over the Bolton nomination and his repeated efforts to falsify U.S. intelligence assessments.

British Intelligence Leaks

The exposure of this intelligence-fixing is trans-Atlantic. In a major disclosure which drew little initial attention in the United States, the *Sunday Times* of London published a leaked, highly classified memorandum summarizing a July 2002 meeting between British Prime Minister Blair and his top security advisors. (See *Documentation*.) The memo reviewed a report given by Richard Dearlove, the head of MI-

6 (British foreign intelligence), regarding his then-recent visit to the United States, in which Dearlove reported that the policy-decision had been made to go to war against Saddam Hussein, and that "the intelligence and facts were being fixed around the policy." British Defense Secretary Jack Straw was quoted: "It seemed clear that Bush had made up his mind to take military action. . . . But the case was thin."

Indeed it was. But with excruciating pressure being put on intelligence community analysts to agree, or otherwise just shunting them aside, the case was cobbled together, with the embarrassing results seen in Secretary of State Colin Powell's presentation to the UN Security Council in February 2003.

Responding to the MI-6 disclosures, 88 members of Congress, led by Rep. John Conyers (D-Mich.), sent a letter to President Bush on May 5, stating that the document "raises troubling new questions regarding the legal justifications for the war as well as the integrity of your own Administration."

Bolton's role in this fiasco is now coming to light, and there is much more yet to come, contained in a still-secret State Department Inspector General's report, which reportedly describes Bolton's attempts to counter and circumvent the State Department's intelligence arm, the Bureau of Intelligence and Research (INR), by transforming the Bureau of Verification and Compliance into his own intelligence-cooking shop—parallel to what Doug Feith and the "Chicken-hawks" were doing in the Pentagon with their Office of Special Plans.

One notable example of Bolton's direct role on the falsification of Iraq intelligence, regards the Niger "yellowcake" canard—the fictional story that Saddam Hussein was attempting to buy uranium ore from that African country. Bolton overrode State Department INR and the CIA to have the yellowcake fable inserted into a State Department "Fact Sheet" in December 2002. Rep. Henry Waxman (D-Calif.) is asking

for an investigation of this (see *EIR*, April 29).

It is also being reported that Powell himself has told Senators in recent weeks that it was Bolton who was largely responsible for inserting the claims on WMD into his UN speech—claims which turned out to be all wrong.

With this as backdrop, we now review what happened in the Republican-dominated Senate Foreign Relations Committee on May 12, when White House allies were unable to muster a majority of committee members to endorse the Bolton nomination, and had to send the nomination to the Senate floor without any recommendation—a highly unusual, but not completely unprecedented, procedure.

‘What Message Are We Sending?’

On April 19, as we previously reported, the Foreign Relations Committee was blocked from approving the Bolton nomination, by the action of Sen. George Voinovich (R-Ohio), with the implicit backing of two or three other Republicans. It was then agreed that the vote would be rescheduled for May 12, with the committee staff jointly conducting a further investigation, comprised of interviews and examination of documents. In the interim period, 31 witnesses were interviewed or re-interviewed, and hundreds of pages of documents were reviewed, with many more hundreds of pages being withheld by the State Department and the Director of National Intelligence (these being transcripts of National Security Agency-monitored conversations involving U.S. officials, which Bolton had earlier requested to review).

At the May 12 meeting of the committee, Chairman Richard Lugar (R-Ind.) opened with a rather tepid and measured endorsement of the Bolton nomination, and he then yielded the floor, by pre-arrangement, to Senator Voinovich, who proceeded to deliver a scathing attack on Bolton, calling him “the poster-child of what someone in the diplomatic corps should not be.”

Voinovich said that his major concern is the decline of U.S. standing in the world, and how the United States today is criticized for “arrogance, unilateralism, and for failing to listen and to seek the support of its friends and allies.” He noted the “drastic change in the attitude of our friends and allies,” which has meant that the U.S. is carrying most of the burden of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, including the deaths of over 1,500 American servicemen and women in Iraq.

The key to reversing this is public diplomacy, Senator Voinovich said. “But what message are we sending to the world community, when in the same breath we have sought to appoint an Ambassador to the United Nations who himself has been accused of being arrogant, of not listening to his friends, of acting unilaterally, of bullying those who do not have the ability to properly defend themselves? These are the very characteristics that we’re trying to dispel in the world community.”

Voinovich pointed out that when he discussed his concerns about Bolton with Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice,

she told him that “she would be in frequent communication with him and he would be closely supervised.” But, asked Voinovich: “Why in the world would you want to send somebody up to the UN that has to be supervised?”

After cataloguing the statements by many senior State Department officials describing Bolton’s conduct and abuse of subordinates, Voinovich declared, “I believe that John Bolton would have been fired if he’d worked for a major corporation.” But after all this, Voinovich stated that he believes the President deserves an up-or-down vote on the floor of the Senate for his nominee, so he urged sending the nomination to the floor without recommendation—despite his own avowed opposition to Bolton.

The Constitutional Role of the Senate

Sen. Joseph Biden (Del.), the senior Democrat on the committee, immediately served notice that he will continue to fight for the right of the Senate to obtain the information from the State Department and the National Security Agency (NSA) which it needs to perform its Constitutional role. He pointed out that Secretary of State Rice had refused to hand over some requested material, on the grounds that the State Department had decided the material was not relevant to the issues being deliberated on by the committee. “We have a right to this information, not only as members of this committee, but in our specific responsibility of exercising our advise and consent responsibility. . . . The integrity of the nominating process and our Constitutional role is being challenged,” Biden said.

During the debate that followed, Democrats on the committee stuck to their position that the issue is not Bolton’s rudeness or his personality, but his repeated attempts to distort intelligence, and to get intelligence analysts transferred or fired if they didn’t give him the answers he demanded.

Biden emphasized that all of the witnesses against Bolton had come to the committee; the Democrats hadn’t dug them up, and that “the primary witnesses . . . who have some very damaging things to say about Mr. Bolton’s actions, are all in a Republican administration.”

Sen. Chris Dodd (D-Conn.) also stated that his objection is not to Bolton’s style, but to the manipulation of intelligence. “My concern is that we’ve just come through an incredible period in American history, where major decisions were made about this nation’s foreign policy based on the intelligence we are receiving. People are losing their lives every single day in a far-off land here, because there was a firm belief, based on the intelligence we had, that weapons of mass destruction existed. . . . We now know that not to be the case.”

The other Republicans who had been considered to be wavering at one point or another—Chuck Hagel (Neb.), Lincoln Chafee (R.I.), and Lisa Murkowski (Alaska)—all dutifully pledged that they would “support the President’s nomination.” Chafee cited the many charges and accusations about Bolton’s intimidation of intelligence analysts, and he acknowledged, “I’m apprehensive that by promoting John

Bolton, we're signalling an endorsement of that intimidation." Murkowski was the most critical of Bolton, including for his berating of intelligence analysts, but she said that the President deserves to have the nominee of his choice. However, she warned that Bolton's conduct as UN Ambassador "is going to reflect directly on the President."

In the end, Chairman Lugar did not even submit a motion for Bolton's approval to the committee, which would have been a futile gesture; the motion was to send it without recommendation, which passed on a party-line vote of 10-8—hardly what the White House wanted.

On the evening of May 12, Sen. Barbara Boxer (D-Calif) put a "hold" on the nomination, which prevents it from going to the floor until it is withdrawn or overridden by 60 votes. In press interviews, when Biden was asked whether Democrats would filibuster the nomination on the floor, he said that no decision has been made, but there will be several days' debate at a minimum, and he insisted that "unless we get information that we are entitled to as the U.S. Senate from the State Department that was requested weeks ago, that's the kind of thing that could precipitate this kind of institutional showdown."