

The New Age of Disarmament Wars

By Ian Williams | February 20, 2003

Much of the world is worried about the impending war with Iraq, and rightly so. But this may just be the beginning of a new age of disarmament wars.

From the homeland of Armageddon this week came worrying signs that we should begin worrying about the even longer and harder wars to follow. John Bolton, U.S. Under Secretary of State for Disarmament Affairs and International Security, was in Israel this week, for meetings about “preventing the spread of weapons of mass destruction.”

It seems appropriate for the U.S. and Israel to meet about disarmament issues. After all, Israel is universally acknowledged by everyone—excepting the U.S. government—as a considerable nuclear power, and much of the world regards its prime minister as a profound threat to international security. However, we can be sure that neither item was on Bolton’s agenda.

Bolton-Sharon Style Disarmament

While in Israel, Bolton met Sharon and Netanyahu. He promised that after the U.S. has sorted Iraq “it will be necessary to deal with threats from Syria, Iran, and North Korea afterwards.” For Bolton and Sharon, disarmament is what you do to other people, no more and no less.

Unlike most of his colleagues in Washington, Bolton seems to have kept his counsel on France and Germany—at least this time. But that should not be taken as any sign of disagreement with Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld’s spat with “Old Europe.” Previously, Bolton had sounded the alert, warning that “the Europeans can be sure that America’s days as a well-bred doormat for EU political and military protection are coming to an end.”

The venue for Bolton’s disarmament talks is significant. Although Israel is agnostic on Kim Jong Il, there is no doubt that the rest of Bolton’s dominoes

fall exactly in line with the eschatological plans of the Likudnik fundamentalists. When they met, Sharon told him that Israel was “concerned about the security threat posed by Iran” and that it was important to deal with it even while American attention is turned toward Iraq. Since it was the Israelis and the Reagan administration that had conspired to provide weaponry for Iran in the 1980s, we know how strongly and consistently they feel about this.

Indeed, Bolton and Sharon have been as one for some time. Soon after George W. Bush’s discovery of the “Axis of Evil,” Bolton promptly fingered Cuba and Libya as a sort of mini-Axis and as potential possessors of missiles and weapons of mass destruction. Although Sharon was agnostic this time on Cuba, he happily endorsed adding Libya to the hit list along with Iran and Syria.

John Bolton is one of the major reasons why few other countries trust the motives, or indeed the rationality of the U.S. administration (the list of other reasons keeps growing, but the ravings of Wolfowitz, Perle, Cheney, and Rumsfeld spring immediately to an apprehensive observer’s mind).

These are the people whose statements scare off the diplomatic ducks that Colin Powell so assiduously tries to line up. In addition, the continual gaffes of hawks like Bolton make the U.S. position seem even more hypocritical in the global arena. For example, the ostensible excuse for attacking Iraq is its defiance of UN resolutions. However, Bolton has defied the UN’s very existence for most of his political career. He has made it plain that the U.S. government should not abide by any UN decisions that may prove inconvenient to the U.S. pursuit of its national interests.



Washington's UN Double-Speak

Last year as the rest of the world was deciding that Hans Blix, the head of UNMOVIC, was a trustworthy arbiter, Bolton had the CIA vet him because he suspected him to be unreliable. One feels sure that he still does, even though the CIA gave the good Doctor Blix a clean bill of health.

However, Bolton is at least consistent. His political career began in UN-bashing. In 1994 he asserted that “there is no such thing as the United Nations” or that “if the UN Secretariat building in New York lost 10 stories, it wouldn't make a bit of difference.” Nonetheless, his firm principles can be malleable when hit by self interest. Taking ten floors off the 38 of the UN HQ would have left the 27th floor. That's where the UN finance department issued his pay check when he became James Baker's assistant in the UN mission to abrogate Security Council resolutions against the Moroccan occupation of Western Sahara.

It is difficult to square his bashing of the UN with the Bush administration's blandishing the Security Council members to “save” the organization, to preserve its credibility and relevance—by doing exactly what it is told. Perhaps because Bolton was absent from Washington, in Israel this week, the administration has reluctantly accepted the desirability for a second UN resolution to authorize war. Certainly, this is not due to any abstract attachment to principles. Rather, Tony Blair persuaded Bush that the few allies the U.S. has need such a resolution to quell their restive electorates.

Of course electorates do not always figure well with the White House. Bolton was foisted on a reluctant Powell by other hardliners in the administration, not least for his role in chad-counting in Florida before the Supreme Court appointed Bush.

But then he has not always been so keen on the judicial approach. For the past two years, his single-handed campaign to destroy the effectiveness of the International Criminal Court (ICC) has done much to cement European and third world resentment of U.S. “diplomacy” and unity in advance of the Iraq issue.

Indeed, his campaign get bilateral treaties exempting American citizens from the ICC's jurisdiction precipitated the fissure lines we now see emerging in the global community. His few successes include the East Europeans, desperate to get into NATO, as well as the tiny island states, which are, well, just desperate. Even the role of one less tiny island state—Britain—foreshadows the role it has played over Iraq. After all, it was Tony Blair who effectively split united EU resistance to the American campaign.

The Bolton campaign's major diplomatic “success,” however, was that his undiplomatic pressure provoked a record number of countries into signing and ratifying the Rome Treaty quickly so that the ICC was actually established several years before its sponsors anticipated. Bolton is to diplomacy what Jack the Ripper was to surgery.

Bearing in mind the Middle East venue for the current combat, Senator Jesse Helms had endorsed Bolton's appointment with what one hopes was unconscious irony “John Bolton is the kind of man with whom I would want to stand at Armageddon, if it should be my lot to be on hand for what is forecast to be the final battle between good and evil in this world.”

Media Silence

Almost as amazing as Bolton's statements is the relative silence of the U.S. media about him and other administration hawks. Shouldn't the American public know that senior administration officials are promising that after a war with Iraq, there will be one with Iran, and then one with Syria, with Libya, with North Korea, and with Cuba? Each of these is a scenario that could frighten the American public. Taken together, George W. Bush is threatening to make the Prussian kings look like Pacifists. Do those Reservists in the Gulf know how long they will be away, making the world fertile for terrorism?

Some argued that you can ignore the likes of Bolton because they are just token eccentrics—there to appease the right wing of the Republican Party. Such complacency is ill-grounded. The first two years of Bush foreign policy—with the promulgation of the Axis of Evil, the campaign against the ICC, the abro-

gation of Kyoto, the unlimited support for Ariel Sharon's behavior, and the gratuitous attacks on long-standing allies who have the temerity to disagree over Iraq—should warn us to take heed.

We do not have to agree with those Bible Study classes in the White House on prophetic power to prophesy that it would be very dangerous to ignore Bolton's statements. These are harbingers of endless

wars. It's a long, long way to Teheran, but these hawks are putting their heart into going there. Or rather, as most of them did in Vietnam, sending others.

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