

# Bolton—No More Mr. Nice Guy

By Ian Williams | March 10, 2005

This is a time for a Marxist view of foreign policy. As Chico said, “There ain’t no Sanity Clause,” in Washington.

A diplomat is someone who is sent abroad to lie for his country. John Bolton is no dissimulator. What the world will now see is the reality behind Bush’s occasional attempts to don a red suit and a white beard.

So while on one level appointing John Bolton as U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations is the contemporary equivalent of having King Herod as head of UNICEF, there is some comfort to be drawn from it. He will be singularly ineffective in winning friends and support for the White House’s policies.

Europe and the rest of the world have really tried hard to go along with the Super Power, but to justify it to themselves, and their electorates, they have often had to assume a rationality on the part of American foreign policy that has, in reality, been absent for some time now. Colin Powell, and the more suave professional American diplomats at the United Nations have either covered up for the irrationality, or they have appealed to allies to go along with them for fear that the lunatics would take over the asylum. It has been a bad cop/good cop routine that often worked.

It will be difficult to use that form of leverage now that that contingency has so clearly happened. It is now a mad cop/bad cop routine. Even close American allies will now have difficulty groveling gracefully in the face of Bolton’s rebarbative manner.

For example, John Bolton’s dismissal of the UN, International Law, the International Criminal Court and conventions of nuclear testing, land mines, child soldiers, and small arms are all at total loggerheads with Tony Blair’s stated positions. Indeed, Bolton’s robust dismissal of humanitarian intervention as a concept, and as applied in Kosovo, is not only a personal affront to Blair, but undermines the rationale on which the British Prime Minister excused himself from getting a UN mandate in Iraq.

As Bolton told *Insight* magazine, “It is a big mistake for us to grant any validity to international law even when it may seem in our short-term interest to do so—because, over the long term, the goal of those who think that international law really means anything are those who want to constrict the United States. We ought to be concerned about this so-called right of humanitarian intervention—a right of intervention that is just a gleam in one beholder’s eye but looks like flat-out aggression to somebody else. What we did was bomb innocent civilian Serbs into the ground in order that the Albanians can come back and ethnically cleanse the Serbs’ relatives out of what’s left of Kosovo.” He wriggled a lot over that when it was brought up in his last confirmation hearings, but he certainly never explicitly retracted it.

So is there any rational excuse for unleashing this Hobbesian ideologue on the United Nations? Did Bush know the signal he was sending to the world, or is he genuinely unaware?

Cheney Resurgent?

In terms of the incestuous White House politics that could not give a fig for the rest of the world, it makes eminent sense. Whether or not Condoleezza Rice is really a multilateralist or is just pretending, she knew that Bolton in the State Department would not help the image she was trying to build in the wake of Colin Powell’s departure.

But when she succeeded in getting Bolton out of State, she cut Cheney and Rumsfeld out of the loop, since Bolton was their man there. So they seem to have persuaded Bush that Bolton is just the man to straighten out the United Nations, clear up all the corruption, and so on. Except that Bolton’s definitions are different from others. For example, in 1992 he tried to bully the UN Development Program into

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handing over \$2 million to a conservative think tank that was in essence a pension fund for a colleague.

His monomania has already exacted a price. His refusal to compromise has, for example, certainly stiffened European support for the International Criminal Court, but more painfully has cost the lives of untold thousands in Darfur, where his theological obsession with the Court has already been one of the reasons for the shameful inaction of the Security Council, twelve of whose members want to refer the perpetrators to it.

The U.S. has lined up with China and Algeria as unlikely human rights advocates in stalling. But while China could be persuaded to abstain, Bolton, even if he wanted to, is unlikely, as a former paid lobbyist for Taiwan, to win them over. Indeed, while one may wonder to what depths Britain will stoop to accommodate the U.S., certainly three veto holders in the Council, China, France, and Russia, have all shown that they are very influenced by “face.” Bolton does in “in your face” not face-saving.

So once again, the good news is that the longer term neocon agenda, attacks on Syria, Iran, or even Cuba, is even less likely than before to get support from the UN, and despite the bluster from Bolton, the reality in Iraq has shown the price of a go-it-alone policy.

While he is unlikely to be effective in advancing the administration’s agenda, or rather any of the agendas,

since we seem to be back to a two-track foreign policy again, Bolton will do some serious damage unless he is tightly controlled by the White House.

For example, Kofi Annan wanted to use the next two years to modernize the organization, an act that is at the best of times like retuning a car engine while it is hurtling along the freeway. Sadly however, he now has to do so with one of the most important state’s represented by someone whose explicit line of policy for many decades is that the best UN reform would be for it to dissolve itself.

His second best is not much better. It will be to sabotage the organization on any occasion on which it does not act as a blue fig-leaf to cover the naked aggressiveness of U.S. foreign policy.

If there really is a Sanity Clause in Washington, the Senators on the Foreign Relations Committee should give him the hardest of times in their confirmation hearings. And if there is any spine left attached to heads of state anywhere in the rest of the world, they should be on the phone telling Bush to use the toughness of the hearings as an excuse to pull the nomination.

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*(Ian Williams <uswarreport@igc.org> contributes frequently to Foreign Policy in Focus (online at [www.fpif.org](http://www.fpif.org)) on UN and international affairs.)*

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