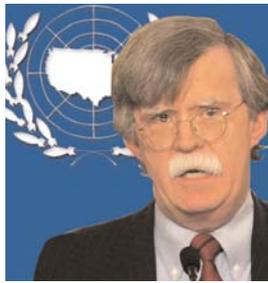


The appointment of John Bolton

by Lillian Bertot Ph.D.



Honorable John Bolton's appointment as United States ambassador to the United Nations faced an unprecedented opposition in the Foreign Relations Committee of the Senate.

Bolton had been nominated last May by president George W. Bush for the position, in a procedure in accordance with the country's political structures that grant the President the power of naming the ambassador. As in the case of all the positions of his government, including the ministers (or cabinet secretaries), the full Congress must ratify the appointment of the ambassador.

The President nominates a candidate in the hope that the Foreign Relations Committee of the Senate recommend the candidate to the full Congress in order to be ratified. The Foreign Relations Committee of the Senate is a bipartisan committee, made up of Senators both Democrats as Republican, or of more parties if there are senators of other parties, but presided in this case by a Republican Senator because the Republican party is the party with the widest representation in the Congress, that is to say the American people elected more Republican senators than Democrat senators to represent them in the Senate.

We include these details in order to highlight the fact that is expected that an appointment made by a president whose party is the majority party would be readily ratified by the Congress, if that is not the case, as it was in Ambassador Bolton's case, the president can, by using his presidential prerogative, name an interim ambassador while the congress is in recess. And this is what President Bush did, since the Foreign Relations Committee never recommended to the Congress President Bush's nomination of Bolton.

This is where the questions start. Who is John Bolton, and why so much opposition? In an article published May 12, 2005, the columnist Robert Novak wrote the following: "Cuba is the topic that defines the horde (test of God) the Senate Foreign Relations Committee has put John Bolton through".

The televised hearings on Bolton's record confirm Novak's impressions. The opposition to the appointment was headed by the Democratic Senator from the state of Connecticut, Christopher Dodd (who strongly favors trade with Cuba), but also opposed were the defeated candidate to the presidency, in last year's elections, John F. Kerry who continues representing the state of Massachusetts in the Senate, and among others, the Senator from Illinois, Barack Obama.

The point in question was a speech delivered by Mr. Bolton in the Heritage Foundation in Washington, D.C. on May 6, 2002 when he was Under Secretary of Arms Control and International Security during President Bush's first administration. The title of his speech was: "Beyond the Axis of Evil: Additional Threats from Weapons of Mass Destruction". Mr. Bolton zeroed in on the efforts of the President to combat the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.

According to Bolton: "The spread of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) to state sponsors of terrorism and terrorist groups is, in my estimation, the gravest security threat we now face[...]" And he adds: "In addition to Libya and Syria, there is a threat coming from another BWC signatory, and one that lies just 90 miles from the U.S. mainland — namely, Cuba. This totalitarian state has long been a violator of human rights. The State Department said last year in its Annual Report on Human Rights Practices that"[...] the Government continued to violate systematically the fundamental, civil, and political rights of its citizens. Citizens do not have the right to change their government peacefully. Prisoners died in jail due to lack of medical care. Members of the security forces and prison officials continued to beat and otherwise

abuse detainees and prisoners [...] The Government denied its citizens the freedoms of speech, press, assembly, and association."

He further stated: "Havana has long provided safehaven for terrorists, earning it a place on the State Department's list of terrorist-sponsoring states. The country is known to be harboring terrorists from Colombia, Spain, and fugitives from the United States. We know that Cuba is collaborating with other state sponsors of terror."

He went on to say: "Castro has repeatedly denounced the U.S. war on terrorism. He continues to view terror as a legitimate tactic to further revolutionary objectives. Last year, Castro visited Iran, Syria and Libya — all designees on the same list of terrorist-sponsoring states. At Tehran University, these were his words: 'Iran and Cuba, in cooperation with each other, can bring America to its knees. The U.S. regime is very weak, and we are witnessing this weakness from close up'". He added:

"But Cuba's threat to our security often has been underplayed. An official U.S. government report in 1998 concluded that Cuba did not represent a significant military threat to the United States or the region. It went only so far as to say that, 'Cuba has a limited capacity to engage in some military and intelligence activities, which could pose a danger to U.S. citizens under some circumstances'".

However, then-Secretary of Defense William Cohen tried to add some balance to this report by expressing in the preface his serious concerns about Cuba's intelligence activities against the United States and its human rights practices. Most notably, he said, "I remain concerned about Cuba's potential to develop and produce biological agents, given its biotechnology infrastructure."

Why was the 1998 report on Cuba so unbalanced? Why did it underplay the threat Cuba posed to the United States? Bolton asked. He added:

"A major reason is Cuba's aggressive intelligence operations against the United States, which included recruiting the Defense Intelligence Agency's senior Cuba analyst, Ana Belén Montes, to spy for Cuba. Montes not only had a hand in drafting the 1998 Cuba report but also passed some of our most sensitive information about Cuba back to Havana. Montes was arrested last fall and pleaded guilty to espionage on March 19th. For four decades Cuba has maintained a well-developed and sophisticated biomedical industry, supported until 1990 by the Soviet Union. This industry is one of the most advanced in Latin America, and leads in the production of pharmaceuticals and vaccines that are sold worldwide. Analysts and Cuban defectors have long cast suspicion on the activities conducted in these biomedical facilities."

Bolton added: "Here is what we now know: The United States believes that Cuba has at least a limited offensive biological warfare research and development effort. Cuba has provided dual-use biotechnology to other rogue states. We are concerned that such technology could support BW programs in those states. We call on Cuba to cease all BW-applicable cooperation with rogue states and to fully comply with all of its obligations under the Biological Weapons Convention." And he concluded:

"[...] The Administration will not assume that a country's formal subscription to UN counterterrorism conventions or its membership in multilateral regimes necessarily constitutes an accurate reading of its intentions. We call on Libya, Cuba, and Syria to live up to the agreements they have signed. We will watch closely their actions, not simply listen to their words. Working with our allies, we will expose those countries that do not live up to their commitments."

Finally, he said, "the United States will continue to exercise strong leadership in multilateral forums and will take whatever steps are necessary to protect and defend our interests and eliminate the terrorist threat."