

BUSH NOMINATION CHALLENGES UNITED NATIONS

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As the United Nations reacts to a new report on its largest-ever financial scandal involving the \$60 billion Oil-for-Food program in Iraq, diplomats are weighing President Bush's nomination to be the next U.S. ambassador for the United Nations, John Bolton.

Bolton, whose confirmation hearings are set to begin in the U.S. Senate next week, is an outspoken critic of the United Nations and many say his selection highlights the Bush administration's tough-minded policy in pushing for reform at the international organization.

Why Bolton?

Bolton's nomination is the latest measure taken by the United States to change what it perceives is the United Nation's overly bureaucratic nature.

Backed by Vice President Dick Cheney, Bolton has long emphasized the unique role the United States plays as the world's only superpower. He also has said America does not need the U.N. approval to make its own decisions.

Secretary of State Condoleeza Rice said in a press conference announcing Bolton's nomination that he was chosen, "because he knows how to get things done."

As the undersecretary of state for arms control and international security during President Bush's first term, Bolton helped negotiate with Libya to stop its nuclear program, implemented a treaty to reduce nuclear warheads with Russia and drafted resolutions aimed at stopping the transport of dangerous arms across the world.

He considers one of his biggest accomplishments to be the repealing of the United Nation's 1975 resolution equating Zionism-- the push for a Jewish nation in Israel-- with racism. Critics of the United Nations point to this resolution as an example of the organization's inability to make strong moral judgments.

Criticism of Bolton

But the nomination of the outspoken Bolton has drawn fire. Sixty-two former American diplomats voiced their opposition in a letter to the Senate, which must approve the choice.

The former American diplomats said the candidate has an "exceptional record", but stressed he is wrong the man for the job.

"John Bolton's insistence that the U.N. is valuable only when it directly serves the United States,

and that the most effective Security Council would be one where the U.S. is the only permanent member, will not help him to negotiate with representatives of the remaining 96 percent of humanity," the letter read.

The diplomats argue that Bolton will do little to repair relations, which were damaged by the Bush administration's decision to sidestep the United Nations and invade Iraq War two years ago.

His critics point to a 1997 article for the American Enterprise Institute in which Bolton wrote that international treaties and the U.N. charter are "simply political obligations" and that the United States is not legally obligated to pay its U.N. dues.

He has also been widely quoted as saying, "If the U.N. secretary building in New York lost 10 stories, it wouldn't make a bit of difference."

Bolton responds that the comments were not meant to be as harsh as they sound and that the United Nations can and should be reformed.

U.N. Problems

Bolton's nomination comes at a time when the United Nations itself is embroiled with controversial charges of irrelevancy and corruption.

Two of the top officials were suspended in connection to accusations of corruption in the Iraqi oil-for-food program, which let Saddam Hussein's government sell oil to buy aid goods it could not get because of international sanctions.

A separate report also accused U.N. peacekeepers of sexual misconduct, most notably in Congo where more than 150 allegations of abuse have been made on 50 peacekeeping soldiers.

Changing the United Nations

U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan, who is stepping down next year, says the United Nations is transforming itself by changing its top staff, increasing accountability and taking on the challenges of global terrorism.

Annan recently announced plans to reform the U.N.'s international security system. He has also suggested shoring up money to create a new world body to coordinate peacekeeping efforts. He plans to seek approval of these reforms with world leaders in a summit at the U.N. headquarters in September.

-- *Compiled by Evelio Contrera for NewsHour Extra*

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