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Votes in Doubt, Bolton Resigns as Ambassador



Stephen Crowley/The New York Times

President Bush, meeting with John R. Bolton yesterday in the Oval Office, praised him for his “advocacy of human rights and human dignity.”

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By HELENE COOPER

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WASHINGTON, Dec. 4 — President Bush reluctantly accepted the resignation of the [United Nations](#) ambassador, [John R. Bolton](#), on Monday, conceding that the envoy could not win Senate confirmation and signaling that the administration was unwilling to make another end run around Congressional opponents in order to keep Mr. Bolton in his job.

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Ending more than a year of controversy surrounding the blunt-spoken ambassador, Mr. Bush issued a strongly worded statement excoriating Mr. Bolton's opponents on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee for refusing to send his nomination to the Senate floor for a vote.

"They chose to obstruct his confirmation, even though he enjoys majority support in the Senate, and even though their tactics will disrupt our diplomatic work at a sensitive and important time," Mr. Bush said. "This stubborn obstructionism ill serves our country, and discourages men and women of talent from serving their nation."

Mr. Bush went on to praise Mr. Bolton, a fiery conservative and longtime critic of the United Nations, thanking him for his "advocacy of human rights and human dignity."

Despite the president's strong words, administration officials had largely given up on Mr. Bolton's confirmation last month, after Sen. [Lincoln Chafee](#), a Rhode Island Republican and a member of the Foreign Relations Committee, said he would not support it.

It was not immediately clear who would replace Mr. Bolton. The leading candidate appeared to be the American ambassador to Iraq, Zalmay Khalilzad, who has told colleagues he is ready to leave Baghdad. Others said to be in the running are Richard S. Williamson, former ambassador to the [United Nations Commission on Human Rights](#), Sen. Mike DeWine, the Ohio Republican who lost his re-election bid, and R. Nicholas Burns, the undersecretary of state for political affairs.

Mr. Bolton's decision to step down brings to an end the stormy and controversial tenure of an ambassador whose confrontational style often conflicted with the understated ways of the United Nations.

To his critics, he was an abrasive proponent of a hard-line, conservative ideology at odds with the multilateral approach at the United Nations. But his supporters pointed to numerous successes: several Security Council resolutions, including measures seeking to slow or halt the nuclear ambitions of Iran and North Korea and another ending the war in Lebanon and establishing a United Nations peacekeeping force there.

Mr. Chafee, who lost his Senate seat in last month's elections, perhaps best captured the political reality that has engulfed Mr. Bolton since he took office in a recess appointment last year.

"The American people have spoken out against the president's agenda on a number of fronts, and presumably one of those is on foreign policy," Mr. Chafee said last month.

Mr. Chafee's decision might have been the end of the matter. But White House officials began exploring whether the president could somehow bypass the Senate to keep Mr. Bolton at the United Nations, perhaps by naming him to be Mr. Bush's special envoy or to some other post that would not require Senate confirmation.

Mr. Bolton wanted very much to stay at the world body, administration officials said, and Vice President [Dick Cheney](#) backed exploration of some way to bypass the Senate. But that course was almost certain to inflame tensions between Congress and the White House, and in the end, Mr. Cheney and Mr. Bolton gave up.

Lea Anne McBride, a spokeswoman for Mr. Cheney, said that Mr. Bolton came to Washington on Thursday and met with the vice president. At the meeting, the two men decided not to press the issue any further. On Friday, Mr. Bolton sent a resignation letter to President Bush.

"After careful consideration, I have concluded that my service in your administration should end when the current recess appointment ends," Mr. Bolton wrote.

President Bush initially appointed Mr. Bolton during a Congressional recess last year after the Foreign Relations Committee sent his nomination to the floor without a recommendation. That term expires at the end of this year. Mr. Bush could give Mr. Bolton a second recess appointment, but under the law he could not be paid for his work.

Administration officials, speaking on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to speak publicly about their internal deliberations, said that they dropped the idea of circumventing the Senate by appointing him to a special position at the United Nations because they did not want another fight.

"That would have been too much for the Senate," said Carl Tobias, a law professor at the University of Richmond. "I suppose it could have been done, but it would have undermined Bolton's authority at the U.N."

Mr. Bolton's resignation leaves President Bush with three holes in his national security team: at the United Nations; the State Department, where Ms. Rice's deputy, [Robert B. Zoellick](#), resigned in June; and at the office of the director of National Intelligence, where the job of deputy has been vacant since [Michael V. Hayden](#) was named [C.I.A.](#) director in May.

How Mr. Bush chooses to fill those jobs could indicate which direction the administration will tilt during its last two years, administration officials and United Nations diplomats said. Since the midterm elections, foreign policy realists have appeared to be ascendant at the expense of more ideological conservatives.

Of those said to be under consideration, Mr. Burns has expressed interest in the job, administration officials said, but he is also Secretary of State [Condoleezza Rice](#)'s most trusted deputy, and she may be unwilling to relinquish him. Administration officials said that an appointment of Mr. Burns, who served under President Clinton as well, might further alienate conservatives who are already unhappy about Mr. Bolton's departure.

United Nations officials sent out a dictate that the official statement would be "no comment" on Mr. Bolton's departure. Secretary General [Kofi Annan](#), buttonholed by reporters after the announcement, was restrained in his remarks. "I think Ambassador Bolton did the job he was expected to do," he said, adding that it is important for ambassadors to "understand that to get concessions, they have to make concessions."

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