

Wolfowitz must go

by The San Diego Union-Tribune

There are legitimate reasons to feel sorry for embattled World Bank President Paul Wolfowitz. The furor over his role in securing a raise for Shaha Riza, a former World Bank official he is involved with, seems excessive. Yes, he showed dubious judgment. But the fact that he brought up his conflict of interest and discussed the matter with the bank's ethics committee before acting on the raise is often glossed over - even though it is highly relevant.

Why? Because, as New York Times' columnist David Brooks wrote recently, "Most scandals are pretexts for members of an establishment to destroy people they don't like."

Some in the U.S. media and in foreign governments don't like Wolfowitz, a former Pentagon executive, for his role in the Iraq war. Some nations don't care for his demand that the dozens of poor nations that rely on the World Bank for financial and technical assistance be much tougher on internal corruption. Hundreds, perhaps thousands, of the World Bank's 13,000 employees, including senior executives, consider Wolfowitz to be a poor boss - distant, incommunicative and disdainful of the World Bank's considerable history.

Put these varied grievances together, and it becomes obvious that Wolfowitz must resign. Whether he has been given a fair shake - he has only served two years of a five-year term - is less important than the fact that his credibility and authority have been crippled.

The fairness question is also less important than the fact that the United States will retain its power to name Wolfowitz's successor under a deal offered by European nations pressing for his departure. Previously, these nations were considering trying to scrap the tradition under which the United States - the bank's largest shareholder - picks its president.

So if Wolfowitz leaves promptly, the Bush administration will have a chance to install another reformer - presumably one who understands that managing a sprawling, proud institution involves far more than issuing diktats and assuming they will be met with enthusiasm.

If Wolfowitz is as bright and dedicated a public servant as his admirers say, then he must know he must go. If he really wants progress for such pet causes as using the World Bank's clout to limit the systematic looting of foreign aid by African despots, who is more likely to succeed: Wolfowitz or a U.S. reformer without all his baggage?

The answer is plain.

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