

Obama's Road to Damascus

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History will record that Barack Obama's first act of diplomacy as America's president-elect took place two days after his election victory, when he dispatched his senior foreign-policy adviser, Robert Malley, to meet with Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak and Syrian President Bashar al-Assad—to outline for them the forthcoming administration's Mideast policy vis-à-vis those nations. An aide to Malley reports, "The tenor of the messages was that the Obama administration would take into greater account Egyptian and Syrian interests than has President Bush. The Bush administration, it should be noted, has rightly recognized Syria to be not only a chief supporter of the al Qaeda insurgency in Iraq, but also the headquarters of the terrorist organization Palestinian Islamic Jihad and the longtime sponsor of Hamas—the terrorist army whose founding charter is irrevocably committed to the annihilation of Israel. Yet unlike President Bush, Obama and Malley have called for Israel to engage in peace negotiations with Syria.

A Harvard-trained lawyer and Rhodes Scholar, Robert Malley is no newcomer to the Obama team. In 2007, Obama selected him as a foreign policy adviser to his campaign. At the time, Malley was (and still is today) the Middle East and North Africa Program Director for the International Crisis Group (ICG), which receives funding from the Open Society Institute of George Soros (who, incidentally, serves on the ICG Executive Committee).

In his capacity with ICG, Malley directs a number of analysts who focus their attention most heavily on the Arab-Israeli conflict, the political and military developments in Iraq, and Islamist movements across the Middle East. Prior to joining ICG, Malley served as President Bill Clinton's Special Assistant for Arab-Israeli Affairs (1998-2001), and as National Security Adviser Sandy Berger's Executive Assistant (1996-1998).

Robert Malley was raised in France. His lineage is noteworthy. His father, Simon Malley (1923-2006), was a key figure in the Egyptian Communist Party. A passionate hater of Israel, the elder Malley was a close friend and confidante of the late PLO terrorist Yasser Arafat; an inveterate critic of "Western imperialism"; a supporter of various revolutionary "liberation movements," particularly the Palestinian cause; a beneficiary of Soviet funding; and a supporter of the 1979 Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. According to American Thinker news editor Ed Lasky, Simon Malley "participated in the wave of anti-imperialist and nationalist ideology that was sweeping the Third World [and] ... wrote thousands of words in support of struggle against Western nations."

In a July 2001 op-ed which Malley penned for the New York Times, he alleged that Israeli—not Palestinian—inflexibility had caused the previous year's Camp David peace talks (brokered by Bill Clinton) to fall apart. This was one of several controversial articles Malley has written—some he co-authored with Hussein Agha, a former adviser to Arafat—blaming Israel and exonerating Arafat (the most prolific Jew-killer since Adolph Hitler) for the failure of the peace process.

Malley's identification of Israel as the cause of the Camp David impasse has been widely embraced by Palestinian and Arab activists around the world, by Holocaust deniers like Norman Finkelstein, and by anti-Israel publications such as Counterpunch. It should be noted that Malley's account of the Camp David negotiations is entirely inconsistent with the recollections of the key figures who participated in those talks—specifically, then-Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak, then-U.S. President Bill Clinton, and then-U.S. Ambassador Dennis Ross (Clinton's Middle East envoy).

Malley also has written numerous op-eds urging the U.S. to disengage from Israel to some degree, and recommending that America reach out to negotiate with its traditional Arab enemies such as Syria, Hamas, Hezbollah (a creature of Iran dedicated to the extermination of the Jews and death to America), and Muqtada al-Sadr (the Shiite terrorist leader in Iraq).

In addition, Malley has advised nations around the world to establish relationships with, and to send financial aid to, the Hamas-led Palestinian government in Gaza. In Malley's calculus, the electoral victory that swept Hamas into power in January 2006 was a manifestation of legitimate Palestinian "anger at years of humiliation and loss of self-respect because of Israeli settlement expansion, Arafat's imprisonment, Israel's incursions, [and] Western lecturing ..."

Moreover, Malley contends that it is both unreasonable and unrealistic for Israel or Western nations to demand that Syria sever its ties with Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad, or Iran. Rather, he suggests that if Israel were to return the Golan Heights (which it captured in the 1967 Six Day War, and again in the 1973 Yom Kippur War—two conflicts sparked by Arab aggression which sought so permanently wipe the Jewish state off the face of the earth) to Syrian control,

Damascus would be inclined to pursue peace with Israel.

Malley has criticized the U.S. for allegedly remaining "on the sidelines" and being a "no-show" in the overall effort to bring peace to the nations of the Middle East. Exhorting the Bush administration to change its policy of refusing to engage diplomatically with terrorists and their sponsoring states, Malley wrote in July 2006: "Today the U.S. does not talk to Iran, Syria, Hamas, the elected Palestinian government or Hezbollah... The result has been a policy with all the appeal of a moral principle and all the effectiveness of a tired harangue."

This inclination to negotiate with any and all enemies of the U.S. and Israel—an impulse which Malley has outlined clearly and consistently—has had a powerful influence on Barack Obama.

It is notable that six months ago the Obama campaign and Malley hastily severed ties with one another after the Times of London reported that Malley had been meeting privately with Hamas leaders on a regular basis—something Obama had publicly pledged never to do. At the time, Obama campaign spokesman Ben LaBolt minimized the significance of this monumentally embarrassing revelation, saying: "Rob Malley has, like hundreds of other experts, provided informal advice to the campaign in the past. He has no formal role in the campaign and he will not play any role in the future."

But indeed, within hours after Obama's election victory, Malley was back as a key player in the president-elect's team of advisors—on his way to Syria. Mr. Obama, meanwhile, received a most friendly communication from Hamas, congratulating him on his "historic victory."

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