

Trump Frees Himself From Bolton - but Robert O'Brien Will Be Just as Bad

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After months of rumors, John Bolton was finally fired from the White House but the post mortem on why it took so long to remove him continues, with the punditry and media trying to understand exactly what happened and why. Perhaps the most complete explanation for what occurred came from President Donald Trump himself shortly after the fact. He said, in some impromptu comments, that his national security advisor had "...made some very big mistakes when he talked about the Libyan model for Kim Jong Un. That was not a good statement to make. You just take a look at what happened with Gadhafi. That was not a good statement to make. And it set us back."

Trump has a point in that Bolton was clearly suggesting that North Korea get rid of its nuclear weapons in exchange for economic benefits, but it was the wrong example to pick as Libyan leader Moammar Gadhafi gave up his weapons and was then ousted and brutally killed in a rebel uprising that was supported by Washington. The Bolton analogy, which may have been deliberate attempt to sabotage any rapprochement, made impossible any agreement between Kim and Trump as Kim received the message loud and clear that he might suffer the same fate.

More recently, Bolton might have been behind media leaks that scuttled Trump's plan to meet with Taliban representatives and that also, acting on behalf of Israel, undercut a presidential suggestion that he might meet with Iranian President Hassan Rouhani. Trump summed up his disagreements with Bolton by saying that the National Security Advisor "wasn't getting along" with other administration officials, adding that

"Frankly he wanted to do things — not necessarily tougher than me. John's known as a tough guy. He's so tough he got us into Iraq. That's tough. But he's somebody that I actually had a very good relationship with, but he wasn't getting along with people in the administration who I consider very important. And you know John wasn't in line with what we were doing. And actually in some cases he thought it was too tough, what we were doing. Mr. Tough Guy."

Trump's final comment on Bolton was that "I'm sure he'll do whatever he can do to spin it his way," a throw-away line that could well set the stage for what comes next. Bolton has many supporters among hardliners in the GOP and the media and will no doubt be inclined to respond to the president in kind, but once the back and forth starts many other factors and relationships will come into play.

After the firing, it was widely believed that Donald Trump might have actually gotten rid of Bolton for all the right reasons, namely that as president he is disinclined to start any new

wars and seeks negotiated solutions to existing conflicts, both of which concepts were no doubt regarded as anathema by the National Security Advisor. Unfortunately, that argument runs into problems where rhetoric and deeds disconnect if one considers actual actions undertaken by the president, to include the man that Trump has now named as Bolton's replacement, Special Presidential Envoy for Hostage Affairs Robert O'Brien.

O'Brien might well have been ranked among the worst possible choices among the names floated in the media for the National Security Advisor position, mostly because he is almost completely lacking in actual experience related to the job. To be sure, he looks more presentable than the wild-eyed and walrus mustachioed Bolton, but Trump has repeatedly been overly deferential towards the bona fides of hardliners like O'Brien who boast of American Exceptionalism. The president will also likely appreciate that the sycophantic O'Brien's lack of experience will mean that he will be completely deferential to the Chief Executive's point of view at all times.

Trump's cabinet choices have been so bad that they have led to musical chairs in nearly all senior positions. The president is to blame for having appointed Bolton, a man he disliked, though admittedly under orders from Israeli-American casino billionaire Sheldon Adelson, and he also did not have to elevate Mike Pompeo first as CIA Director and then as Secretary of State. There is no one around who outdoes Pompeo when it comes to avoiding diplomacy and negotiations while also threatening dire consequences for America's "enemies." O'Brien's hardline credentials are largely indistinguishable from those of Pompeo and Bolton and it is widely believed that his appointment was due to advocacy by the Secretary of State, who is reportedly assembling his national security team.

And it should be observed that Trump's claimed avoidance of war credentials are pretty thin. Far from fulfilling campaign promises to end the wars he inherited, Donald Trump has continued and even escalated those conflicts. He has withdrawn from agreements with Russia and Iran that enhanced US national security. Drone strikes under Trump have increased dramatically and have exceeded the number occurring during both of Obama's terms, while new rules of engagement have led to a major increase in civilian casualties from US bombing directed against ISIS and the Taliban. Most recently in Afghanistan, 30 farm workers were killed in a drone strike. Trump is also doubling down on his support for the Saudi genocide against Yemen.

And the president has demonstrated that he is willing to attack countries that do not threaten the US and with which Washington is not at war. He has twice illegally bombed Syria based on phony intelligence and even when he decided at the last minute not to use force, as he did earlier this year with Iran, there was no serious evidence that he was truly seeking dialogue. He is waging "maximum pressure" economic warfare against both Iran and Venezuela, in both of which countries he has called for regime change. He has threatened Russia over Crimea and Ukraine and is in a trade war with China. Transparent regime change policies coupled with willy-nilly imposing of sanctions are destructive, hostile steps that kill people in the targeted countries and make enemies where none previously existed.

America's new National Security Advisor Robert O'Brien recently featured in a taxpayer funded trip to Stockholm to obtain the release of rapper ASAP Rocky, who had been arrested after getting involved in a fist fight. O'Brien had orders to threaten unspecified retaliation against the Swedish government if it did not accede to White House demands. That exercise

in international bullying means that O'Brien is quintessentially Trump's kind of guy. He has written a book entitled *While America Slept: Restoring American Leadership to a World in Crisis*, calling on the United States to end any "appeasement and retreat," and has described the nuclear agreement with Iran, in predictable neocon fashion, as a repeat of 1938, Hitler and Munich. He was Mitt Romney's foreign policy adviser and is a Mormon, which means he basically lines up alongside the Christian Zionists when it comes to Israel.

The Israel Lobby has predictably welcomed O'Brien. Sandra Parker of Christians United for Israel (CUFI), enthused how

"CUFI enjoys a close working relationship with many officials throughout the Trump Administration, and we look forward to working with Ambassador O'Brien on strengthening the US-Israel relationship, confronting the Iranian menace, and curtailing the threat posed by terrorist organizations such as Hamas and Hezbollah."

Mort Klein President of the Zionist Organization of America observed how

"Mr. O'Brien is a great friend of Israel, and is now the top-ranking Mormon in the pro-Israel Trump administration. He is also best friends with ardent Zionist US Ambassador to Germany [Richard] Grenell ... And you can't be a great friend of evangelical Christian Grenell unless you support Israel."

So, does the firing of John Bolton and replacement by Robert O'Brien mean that there will be a change of direction in US foreign policy? The answer has to be no. Trump might well be maneuvering to avoid a new war as he will be in full 2020 campaign mode and wants to avoid falling into a quagmire, but the basic belligerency of the administration and its strong tilt towards supporting feckless allies like Israel and Saudi Arabia is certain to continue.

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