

With the Palestinians, Obama Masters the Art of Pretending

President Barack Obama's chief of staff, Denis McDonough, used his appearance at the recent J Street conference to take a carefully aimed jab at Israel's prime minister.

McDonough was irked that prior to the recent Israeli election, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said that in view of radical Islam's global rise, he did not expect a Palestinian state could safely be created in his lifetime. Then, in a post-election interview, the prime minister clarified that while he was pointing to the hazards of such a state, he had not withdrawn the position he took in 2009, in which he agreed to the establishment of a demilitarized Palestinian state under certain conditions.

"We cannot simply pretend that those comments were never made," McDonough said, referring to Netanyahu's first comment on the subject. That comment by McDonough was puzzling, to say the least. You would think that the Obama administration would be celebrating Netanyahu's second comment, since it sounds closer to the administration's own position.

Instead, there was McDonough, at the J Street convention, clinging to Netanyahu's first comment—it was almost as if he and Obama want Netanyahu to oppose a Palestinian state, so that they have something over which to criticize and pressure him.

But the remarkable thing about McDonough's "we cannot pretend" statement is that the Obama administration frequently does indeed pretend that a foreign leader didn't say something—when a Palestinian leader is the one who said it.

Here are a few examples, just from the past month. (All translations courtesy of *Palestinian Media Watch*.)

On March 1, for example, official *Palestinian Authority Television* announced, "The occupation is using all means to destroy our people and perhaps the most striking one is the drowning of our youth in the swamp of [drug] addiction, after facilitating the entry of all kinds of drugs for our youth."

Obama pretended it never happened—after all, how could he admit that his Palestinian allies indulge in such insane conspiracy theories?

On March 8, Palestinian Authority (PA) President Mahmoud Abbas's Fatah Party celebrated International Women's Day by posting on its official website photos and text praising Amna Muna, a Palestinian woman who kidnapped and murdered an Israeli teenager in 2001. Fatah called her "O glorious one" and declared that she "is always present in our hearts."

Obama pretended it never happened—after all, how could he admit that his Palestinian allies celebrate murderers?

On March 11, the PA dedicated a monument in its capital, Ramallah, to the late Dalal Mughrabi. She was the leader of the Palestinian death squad that murdered Gail Rubin, the niece of U.S. Senator Abraham Ribicoff, and then 37 Israeli bus passengers on the Tel Aviv highway in 1978. The *PA TV* news broadcaster, describing the dedication, announced, "Dalal, Allah bless her, this female martyr, she taught us how we can liberate the homeland ... We all see her as a model and as a symbol for us."

Obama pretended the ceremony never happened—after all, how could he admit that his Palestinian allies glorify the killer of a U.S. senator's niece?

On March 23, the most senior religious official in the PA, Sheikh Muhammad Hussein, declared—as quoted in the official PA newspaper *Al-Hayat Al-Jadida*—"The land of Palestine is waqf (in other words, inalienable religious endowment in Islamic law). It must not be relinquished nor must any part of it be

sold ... It is the duty of the leaders of the [Islamic] nation and its peoples to liberate Palestine and Jerusalem.”

Obama pretended it never happened—after all, how could he admit that his Palestinian allies call for the liberation of all of “Palestine,” that is, the destruction of Israel?

So yes, Mr. McDonough, you certainly could pretend “that those comments [by Netanyahu] were never made”—after all, you and your colleagues are experts at pretending that comments were not made, if it’s politically convenient for you to do so.

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